Mystery Range

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CHAPTER I

FOR some hours Brazo had been lying motionless in a little niche of rock in the wall of a low butte at a curve in the Gila. Brazo's honey-coloured pony, which he called "Blinky" because of a pronounced cast in the animal's left eye, was hobbled some distance down the river in a swale that could not be seen from Brazo's rock bedchamber. Blinky could take care of himself, for he was a range pony duly taught and intelligent.

Brazo had slept long and had slowly awakened when he had become conscious that the diapason of the night insects had ceased. The great white light of Arizona disclosed a pleasant land that was already warm and slumberous. There was no sound, no movement. There was an enormous expanse of sky and an equally enormous stretch of land. The sky was featureless, but there were certain corrugations and excrescences in the land by which one might lay a course if one meditated travelling through it. And because Brazo meditated travelling through the land he was interested in it.

The land was not much different from a great deal of that which he had already ridden over. There were some mountain ranges, an interminable number of low hills,

some bald knobs of rock, systems of valleys, flats, gorges, sand. On the crests of some of the hills was some stunted spruce. Here and there grew cactus, ocotillo, yucca. Because the month was April, there were grass tufts of a brilliant green. In distant flats were splotches of wild flowers.

There was an awesome monotony of sand and sky. From Tombstone to Benson, from Benson to Cochise, from Cochise past Fort Grant to Solomonsville, there had been sky and sand. Northward was more sand and sky. Narrow trails ran into distance and vanished. Other trails came out of nowhere and crossed the one you were riding. Perhaps in a day's travel one might observe in the distance a dust cloud which contained a rider, and it might happen that one would observe a stagecoach lumbering along the horizon. But more often there would be nothing in the world of space.

And yet there was the blessing of a glorious solemnity in the atmosphere, an all-pervading cleanness and virginity, which must have reigned when the earth was finished.

Brazo's niche in the butte faced north, and the strong white light of the sun did not shine upon him. He was aware that the butte was part of a ridge that ran from east to west and that a stage trail ran along the crest of the ridge. Last night, crossing the trail to seek a bed ground for his pony, he had observed the trail and had decided that it ran from Globe to Bowie.

He rolled out of his blanket and sat on the edge of the ledge, dangling his feet while he ran a hand through his hair and rubbed his eyes to banish the last traces of sleep. He yawned, buckled on the cartridge belt and

pistol that had been with him in his blanket all night, glanced at the Winchester rifle that had been within reach, yawned again, and prepared to descend the sloping ground to the river.

He remained motionless, however, for before he could begin his descent he heard sound. Listening intently, he heard the steady, slow beating of horses' hoofs on the trail above him. They came on, growing louder as they neared him, until at last he decided that there were two horses.

Brazo was curious, but not curious enough to disclose himself to the riders of the horses. He sat on his ledge, silent and motionless.

One thing he had decided: The riders were not Apaches. He had heard the creaking of saddle leather.

The horses had been approaching in the steady chop trot affected by the experienced plains pony. While Brazo listened, the chop trot became a walk, then died away completely. The horses had halted.

Then a voice floated over the edge of the butte and reached Brazo's ears:

"There's Solomonsville," it said. "There's Fort Grant."

"I always thought they were the other way 'round," came a second voice. "Curious how a thing gets set in a man's mind."

There was a silence which lasted long. A thin smoke, trailing over the edge of the butte, assailed Brazo's nostrils. The aroma of herb-scented tobacco.

"Eat at Solomonsville?" asked the first voice.

"Suits me."

Another silence. Then the first voice:

"He'll be headin' north to-morrow mornin'. It's near sixty miles. He can't make it by night. He'll probably stay overnight at Bain's Camp—him an' his escort. Niggers! Why, hell! Bain will make the niggers sleep in the stable!"

"He'd ought to," said the second voice.

There was another silence. Apparently the men were finishing their cigarettes. Then the voice of the first man came again:

"We'll water down here a piece. There's a shallow. About a hundred yards. Just beyond that bend."

The horses went on at a walk.

When Brazo could no longer hear the beating of their hoofs, he slid down from the niche in the wall of the butte and made his way along the base of the butte toward the bend in the stream. He moved cautiously and slowly, and when he reached a point from which he could observe the men, they had finished watering their horses and were already riding away. He could not see the faces of the riders, but he observed that one was tall and heavily built while the other was short and slender. Both rode bay horses. The tall man wore a gray shirt and a black Stetson, while the smaller man was arrayed in a blue shirt and a Stetson of a light cream colour. Each wore leather chaps, cartridge belt, and pistol, and carried a rifle in a saddle sheath.

They rode away into the dun distance and again Brazo was engulfed by the silence.

Solomonsville was eastward several miles. From the crest of the butte both Solomonsville and Fort Grant were visible across the featureless distance. The riders had become mere moving dots in the land. They were

no longer close to Brazo, and they were therefore unimportant in his thoughts.

Brazo washed in the shallow waters of the Gila. He built a small fire with some dry branches of chaparral, boiled some coffee in a small pot that he took from the slicker that had been wrapped around his bed roll, and ate some dry biscuit and beef. Later, seated on a huge boulder with a broken section of mirror propped up in front of him, Brazo shaved. Finishing, he rolled all his possessions in the slicker and went down into the swale after his pony, carrying his saddle and rifle. When, a little later, he rode back along the banks of the river, he pulled up at the bend where the two riders had watered their horses and sat motionless in the saddle looking down at the hoof prints in the sand.

Brazo was twenty-five, and many things had happened to him. For fifteen of his twenty-five years there had been no parents to advise him, for in the valley of his home a roving band of Arapahoes had struck without warning while Brazo was bringing in some stray cattle from a distant part of the range.

Brazo's parents had been well educated, and they had bequeathed the young man a brain that functioned with more than ordinary keenness and facility. There must have also descended to Brazo a love of the Western country, for after the killing of his parents he had delved deeper into it. Deeper, but to little advantage.

For though he knew cattle as well as any man and had ability to do various things well, he now found himself, at twenty-five, severing old associations and heading northward, jobless.

Brazo's eyes were agleam with speculation as he

lifted his gaze from the hoof prints at the water's edge and centred it upon the two moving dots that had now dwindled to minute proportions.

He recalled the words of the first voice, which he had already decided belonged to the big man: "He'll be headin' north to-morrow mornin'. It's near sixty miles. He can't make it by night. He'll probably stay overnight at Bain's Camp—him an' his escort. Niggers! Why, hell! Bain will make the niggers sleep in the stable!"

Obviously, someone in whom the two riders were interested was travelling north on the morning of the following day. The riders expected he would sleep at a place that they had called "Bain's Camp." But who, in this wilderness, would travel with an escort of "niggers"? Where would he be likely to get "niggers" to comprise an escort?

Brazo stared thoughtfully into the white light that flooded the dun land. He was not interested in the two riders, though he mentally admitted a slight irritation because what he had overheard was so meagre as to give him no basis upon which to build a theory of the intentions of the riders. His interest was merely speculative. Did the riders mean harm to the one who was "headin' north to-morrow"?

Wrinkles appeared upon Brazo's forehead as he sent his pony clattering up the north slope of the Gila and headed him across a level toward a dim trail that ran with many undulations into the northern distance. He reached the trail and rode it thoughtfully. When he gained an eminence several miles distant, he glanced

backward to find that he could no longer see the two riders.

He himself was riding northward, aimlessly. But he was thinking of various places where, report had told him, he would find cattle. Blue Creek, perhaps. Salt River. The Little Colorado. The latter section would bring him rather far northward, and he decided he would not go that far. He'd try the Salt River section, and then he'd cross into New Mexico and head for Roswell, in Lincoln County, where he'd be almost sure to strike a job.

As a matter of fact, he was in no hurry to acquire a job. In a belt at his waist was six hundred dollars in gold, which would last him a long time, and he felt he could afford to exercise some deliberation in choosing a new employer.

Noon found him in the Gila Mountains. There were Indian signs two or three days old which interested him only enough to cause him to examine them. Just now the Indians were peaceful, and if they became otherwise to-morrow, why that would be to-morrow's problem.

During the afternoon, he threaded one valley after another, though he travelled leisurely and twice watered his pony at water holes which he found close to the trail he rode. He saw no ranch houses, no cattle. Late in the afternoon, while descending a slope that led into a dry arroyo, he came upon a squad of Negro cavalry. There were four men in the squad. They were headed south, and as they passed they grinned widely at him.

After they had ridden out of sight, he turned and looked back at them.

"Why, sure!" he said aloud, slapping a knee. "Anybody with any sense would have thought of that before! The paymaster's due. Now, what do you suppose they meant, anticipating his movements that way?"

The two men who had spoken of the paymaster might be friends. Gamblers, perhaps, who made it their business to hang around army posts near pay day. It would be rather ridiculous to assume that the men meant robbery. They were only two, and there was the squad of Negro soldiers to act as an escort.

The United States Army could take care of itself. Anyway, he remembered no occasion when outside assistance had been called.

He ceased to speculate upon the incident of the morning, and the furrows went out of his brows. And when toward dusk he came in sight of a cluster of boxlike buildings on a level at the edge of a small stream which he surmised was Salt River, he felt that he had reached Bain's Camp.

Later he discovered that his surmise was correct.

Bain's Camp was a stage station. Relays of horses were kept there. There were several buildings and some sprawling corrals. The stable was between Bain's Saloon and a store, and there was a strange mingling of odours which myriads of flies found interesting.

Brazo had made many camps in the open. Here might be found a bed, good feed for Blinky, and refreshing beverages for himself. He unsaddled in the stable, sought the bar, and listened with quiet satisfaction to the clinking of glasses.

CHAPTER II

BAIN'S CAMP was a novelty to Brazo after months spent on the ranges around Tombstone, and one day longer he luxuriated in absolute idleness, giving his pony an opportunity to rest and himself frequent potions of the beverages he found at Bain's bar.

Bain's was little more than a name. Brazo had the bar to himself except for the infrequent visits of the storekeeper and the man who ran the stage stable and corrals. Therefore, although the country in the vicinity of the camp was pleasant enough, Brazo decided that a man could be as lonesome there as riding alone through the country. He told the stableman that he would "pull his freight" before dawn of the following day.

But late in the evening preceding his departure he saw the Negro soldiers again. They rode into Bain's flanking a stagecoach out of which, directly in front of the saloon, stepped the paymaster. The latter, Brazo soon discovered, was addressed as "Major Pitrick."

Pitrick was a big man and wore his blue uniform rather slouchily. Five minutes after his arrival, he was standing at the bar talking loudly to Bain. Not caring to listen to the Major, Brazo went outside and watched the stage move away. He overheard the stableman say that the Major would stay overnight at Bain's and go on to Fort Apache the following morning with his

escort. The Negro cavalrymen had brought along a led horse for the Major.

The cavalrymen were unsaddling in the stable when Brazo reached the doorway, and he gravely watched and listened. They were not permitted to enter the saloon in the presence of the Major, but the stableman was friendly. He disappeared and presently returned with a bottle which the cavalrymen took. They vanished in the direction of a hay shed in the rear of the stable. From that direction, later, Brazo heard much laughter.

The stableman joined Brazo at the door. He jerked a thumb toward the saloon.

"Twelve thousand dollars," he said. "Or somethin' near that."

Brazo divined that the stableman was referring to the amount carried by the paymaster.

"Of course, there ain't much chancet of it gettin' away from him," the stableman went on. "But the way he handles that money fair makes me nervous. Had it in the boot of the stage. Got it out himself, an' I saw the boot wasn't locked. While he was givin' his niggers his orders, the valise was standin' there in the dust with nobody lookin' at it. If I'd have been a thief I could have hid it while he was gassin' to the niggers. An' now he's lickin' up drinks in the saloon. Likely he'll get drunk. He'd ought to keep his niggers right around him to look after the money. But usually they get as drunk as he does."

"There ain't much for an army man to do out here," said Brazo.

"That's right. Well, a thirst ain't hard to develop when you're loafin'."

"I'm wondering why he didn't stay on the stage."

"Stage is drier than Bain's," grinned the stableman. "Well," he added, "likely I'll be up when you pull out. If I ain't, you know where your hoss is."

Brazo paid his bill, so that the item might not be overlooked. He went back to the saloon. Major Pitrick was still standing at the bar, and a little black valise was on the floor at his feet. Brazo had a final drink and then went to his bunk in a rear room.

He did not hear the Major when the latter retired. It seemed to Brazo that he had not been in his bunk five minutes when he was awakened by the gray dawn peeping in his window.

He dressed and went noiselessly outside, for he had left word with Bain that he was leaving early. There was still a trace of night in the gray sky when he reached the door of the stable and went in to saddle his horse.

There was no one about. The Negro cavalrymen were evidently still sleeping, and the stableman was not on hand. Brazo was leading Blinky out toward the door when he heard rapid movement. Then the paymaster appeared in the open doorway. He had been running. His blue coat was open, his huge form was heaving. In one hand was the black valise. He halted in the doorway and shouted:

"Turn out, you black devils! Help!"

He turned, drew a revolver from a holster. Outside came a clatter of hoofs. Major Pitrick did not use the revolver he had drawn. Its muzzle had hardly left the holster when from outside the stable came a crashing report. The Major staggered. There came another crash

from outside, and the Major pitched forward on his face.

The Major's body was not yet still when two men appeared just outside the door. As they loomed against the dark interior of the stable, Brazo recognized them as the two men he had overheard talking at the Gila. Both men had guns drawn, and it was evident to Brazo that their bullets had killed the paymaster. They were after the black valise, and Brazo knew they would kill anyone who might interfere with them. The army should have been able to take care of itself, but this was one instance where it hadn't. Almost cold-blooded, the killing had been, and a sudden rage flamed in Brazo's brain.

He drew his gun and shot twice so rapidly that neither of the two men had time to move a finger in retaliation. The big man went down with a swinish grunt flat on his big stomach. The little man dropped sideways, landing upon a shoulder. Both were motionless, and Brazo was certain he would not need to shoot again. He led his horse out of the stable door and stood for a little time watching the fallen men. It had been fast work. An instant before, there had been nothing but the empty stable door and the gray and silent dawn. Now there were three dead men lying in grotesque positions close to the stable door, and the atmosphere was throbbing with various sounds.

Shouts reached Brazo's ears. From the dark interior of the stable there was a swishing as of men running over the straw-covered floor. There was a clatter of metal, as of muskets rasping together. The stableman, his face white, his lean body arrayed in shirt and overalls, his hair dishevelled, and his eyes wildly staring,

peered out of the doorway at the forms of the men lying in front of the stable door.

He looked at Brazo.

"What—what——" he began, and seemed unable to finish.

From the front door of the saloon came Bain. The ruler of the camp was attired only in an undershirt and drawers. He was barefoot, and the heavy dust of the trail erupted as he hopped forward through it. A Colt .45 dangled from his right hand.

"What's happened?" he questioned as he came near. Then he saw the bodies on the ground. His gaze went to Brazo. "Talk, damn you!" he said.

"There ain't a lot to say," returned Brazo. "I came in to get my horse. I'd saddled and bridled him and was leading him out when the paymaster came running up, carrying his little valise. Seems these two jaspers must have been chasing him, for he turned right in the door and called his niggers. Then he tried to pull his gun, and the big man and the little man downed him. Then I plugged the big man and the little man. That's all there is to it."

"He's a liar!"

The little man had spoken. He had been lying on his right side; now he was sitting half erect, bracing his body with one hand. His face was gray with what was undoubtedly the death pallor, but his eyes were bright and venomous.

"He's a liar!" he repeated, pointing to Brazo with his free hand. "He's a liar, an' he knows it! Me an' my pard was just ridin' up. We're honest men. This here man was holdin' a gun on a soldier. Evidently the soldier wouldn't

do somethin' this man wanted him to do, for he backed off a little an' plugged the soldier twice. Then he turned an' plugged me an' my friend. Sorta thought we'd interfere with him, I reckon!"

The little man was weak; he again stretched out on his side and turned his face away.

There was a silence which was broken by more sounds as of men running through straw. The Negro cavalrymen were coming.

"Let me see your gun," said Bain. He moved toward Brazo, but halted and dropped his own weapon when Brazo's six-shooter was shoved forward almost to his face.

"You're looking at it right now, Bain!" answered Brazo. "And if you do any moving, you won't ever see anything again! That goes for you! He waved the muzzle of the gun toward the stableman.

Brazo's position was precarious. Riding from the Gila to Bain's Camp, he had shot several times at a rattlesnake, and until this minute he had forgotten that he had neglected to reload his gun. The stableman would remember that he had talked with Brazo about the paymaster and the money the latter carried. They would convict him upon the word of the little man.

Holding Bain and the stableman with his waving weapon, he backed to his horse and swung into the saddle. The stableman had no gun, and so the instant he mounted, Brazo sent Blinky plunging at Bain. The latter dived into the stable to escape being run down, and Brazo wheeled Blinky sharply and sent him racing past the saloon. He reached the far corner of the building, skittered around it, and sent Blinky at a wild gallop

into a range of low hills at the rear of the camp. He had just reached the first hill and was swinging wide around its base, with Blinky travelling as he had never travelled before, when he heard bullets whining dolefully around him.

CHAPTER III

THE White Mountains were to the north of Brazo, and he knew that somewhere west of the mountains was Fort Apache, so he rode a little distance up the river until he was screened from sight of Bain's by a long, low ridge. Then he crossed the river in a section of broken country and fled eastward.

He rode about five miles before he reached a wooded eminence, where he halted to rest his pony. There, sheltered from view, he shielded his eyes with his hands and gazed back toward Bain's. He interpreted several puffs of dust as pursuing horsemen and calmly estimated their distance from him. They had been slow enough getting under way, but he knew they were riding hard. They had not picked up his trail yet, for they were darting in all directions from Bain's, spreading out so that one or another of them was sure to stumble upon his tracks. However, most of the riders would be the Negro cavalrymen, and he had little fear of them.

He drew his gun and reloaded it. The chambers were empty, showing that he had shot four times at the rattlesnake. If Bain had had a little more courage, there would have been no need of pursuit.

Brazo interestedly watched the puffs of dust in the distance. Shortly there would be more of them. As the days passed, there would be still others. Word would

go to the Fort, if such word had not already gone; and from there his description would be telegraphed all over the Territory. He would not dare to visit any more settlements. He would have to avoid any riders he might see. Moreover, if he wanted to get out of the country, he would be compelled to do most of his riding at night.

He dropped down the opposite side of the eminence and rode fast across a two-mile level. There, in some spruce at the head of a shallow gorge that ran between two black hills, he halted and gazed backward again. He saw no puffs of dust this time. He rode on again through the gorge and out of it to a sand plain. The plain was several miles wide with a long line of timber on its farther edge. If he could reach the timber without being seen, there was a chance that he might escape the posse behind him, so he urged Blinky to his best. When he reached the timber, he was certain he had not yet been seen, for there were still no puffs of dust anywhere within range of his vision.

He rode far into the timber and dismounted. Blinky had been running hard and was almost winded. He must conserve the pony's strength as much as he could, because there would probably come a time when strength would be needed. That time would not come, however, until other posses got on his trail. Such horses as were used in the cavalry could not match the stamina and speed of Blinky. The stableman at Bain's might have a good horse in the string he maintained there, but he doubted that, for they were nearly all stage horses. Bain himself wouldn't ride out, for Bain would have to stay at the camp to attend to business.

After resting Blinky, Brazo mounted and headed eastward again. Some hours later, he was deep in some hills of the Gila Range. Blue Creek was visible to him at times, though here the stream was a mere trickle of shallow water with an indolent movement that matched the atmosphere. At a point where some rocks led directly into the stream, Brazo entered it and rode for a mile or two through the water. Encountering another rock bank, he emerged and crossed a lava bed to a rocky slope that led down into a narrow gorge which was filled with a wild tangle of undergrowth. Penetrating the gorge for perhaps a mile, he halted Blinky and dismounted. Trailing the reins over the pony's head, he stretched himself out on a slab of stone under a juniper, pulled his hat over his eyes, and rested.

What had happened, had happened, and there was no way of changing it. He was somewhat inclined to admire the little man for his adroitness in shifting the blame for the killing of the paymaster. "Who would have thought he would think of it that quick?" was Brazo's mental interrogation, as he minutely reviewed the episode. "He didn't lose any time in turning things to his own advantage!" But what good would the advantage do him? If Brazo knew anything about the devastating effect of a .45 bullet entering a man's chest near the heart, the little man wouldn't live long to enjoy the malicious satisfaction of knowing some other person would be blamed for the killing of Major Pitrick.

Brazo reflected upon the venomous gleam in the little man's eyes. They had been positively poisonous. Some men were like that.

Brazo keenly appreciated the dangers that now

menaced him. Of course, there were many places in the country in which a man might hide for weeks without fear of discovery. But there would come a time when he would need food, and then he would have to risk appearing in a town or at a ranch house. But if he could succeed in keeping himself invisible for some days, he would have a chance finally to escape.

Brazo's chief emotion over his predicament was annoyance. He felt that, if he had been a lazy man or a more ambitious one, he would not have arrived at the stable at the time the two men and the paymaster had clashed. Being lazy, he would have remained in his bunk longer; being more ambitious, he would have been at the stable earlier. Yet such thoughts were futile, and he ceased entertaining them. He had to face the fact that, although he was innocent of any crime, he was a fugitive. He could not permit himself to be taken, for he could not prove his innocence.

He slept on the slab of rock in the gorge until a flood of pearl and amethyst swept over the world, telling him that the short Arizona twilight had come. He got up, went to Blinky, removed and unrolled the slicker, and dined on some dried beef and soda biscuit. Just before the dusk came, he climbed cautiously to the crest of one of the walls flanking the gorge and peered out of some brush at the surrounding country.

The gray, limitless expanse of land was quiet and seemed strangely solemn. Brazo felt that the solemnity was in himself, though, it having been born of his realization that this was the first time in his life that he had ever been hunted.

He could not go where he wanted to go. Worse,

beyond the various ridges and hills there might be riders who would be searching for him, to kill him should he offer resistance to capture.

He frowned and descended the wall of the gorge. He was aware of a strange and new emotion. Many times, in other days, he had ridden alone into far, wild sections of the country, but always in his thoughts had been the assurance that he was linked to other men by the tie of friendship, and that no matter where he went he could resume association with his fellows at will.

Now he was cut off from all such association or from any communication with his friends or acquaintances. All ties that had bound him with other men had been broken. He could no longer ride at will; he could not appear in a town or at a ranch house. He would have to avoid meeting other riders for fear such riders might prove to be seeking him. He was a pariah, to be shunned by those who had been friendly to him.

When darkness fell, he mounted Blinky and rode out of the gorge to the creek. He watered the pony and filled his canteen, mounted again, and rode out of the river valley to higher ground.

They would do little searching for him at night. They would watch for signs, however, for a fire which he might be foolish enough to make; or they would lie in some place of concealment in the hope that he might ride near and expose himself. They would light no fires. They would have watchers posted upon all the trails; riders would carry news of him to all the ranchers in the section. They would guard the water holes, the accessible places in the rivers.

Brazo knew little about the country in this direction,

but he was aware that there were several small towns between him and the Rio Grande. He would have to avoid these towns as he would have to avoid all trails leading to and from them. Therefore, although he kept on level land during the greater part of the night, the first streak of dawn found him again in the hills.

When the sun rose, he was in some timber on the shoulder of a mountain, and his pony was tethered in a deep recess which was also screened by a growth of brush. Brazo made his way upward, keeping himself behind bushes and small spruces until he gained the summit. There, lying flat on his stomach, he scanned the dun land that encompassed him.

Northward, he observed half a dozen riders on the sky line. Southward, in a flat, he saw various little dust clouds erupting. The dust clouds were far away, but he knew they contained riders. Eastward and westward were other dust clouds. There were a great many of them.

Brazo spent the entire day watching the clouds and speculating about them. So far he had fooled them. Not a rider in any of the posses had picked up his trail. They were merely combing the country, searching. After a while, conceding they did not find him, they would search elsewhere. Brazo stayed on the mountain top all night, thinking the riders would be gone in the morning. But when the light again came he saw them, as before, searching.

Brazo and Blinky had been for more than twenty-four hours without water, for Brazo had emptied his canteen the preceding morning, thinking he would be able to refill it from some stream during the night. But he had

not left the mountain top during the night, and now thirst was torturing him.

He went down the mountain when night came. The riders seemed to have drawn off a little. He rode around the bases of the foothills in search of water, and found none. But during the day he had observed, far southward, a line of green which he knew must be timber, and which he was certain was a fringe of trees following a stream. As a result of his observations from the mountain top, he was convinced that he was close to one of the small streams that were tributary to the Gila, and that he had spent two days and a night in the Datil Range.

Before daybreak he reached the timber; and from the crest of a butte which was almost hidden by a wild growth of weeds and bushes, he watched riders of a posse searching the limits of a big basin. Brazo's pony was in a small box cañon below him.

The day passed. Brazo was now hungry as well as thirsty. That night he found water again, for the pony and himself, and by daylight the following morning he was concealed in some wild brush on a high ridge fifty miles east of the Butte that had been his latest camp. He had ridden recklessly during the night, hoping to lose his pursuers among the mountain ranges, and now both he and Blinky were exhausted.

Blinky he had hidden in a gulch in the valley behind him. The pony was in better shape than Brazo. For three days Brazo had been without food. He had not shaved since leaving Bain's Camp; he had not taken time to wash for fear of someone surprising him; he was gray with alkali dust which had settled upon him;

his eyes were rimmed with red from loss of sleep and constant watching; and in his heart was beginning to burn a flame of contempt and rage.

Yet he knew he must not yield to either. He was aware that the members of the posse were hardy, grim men whose wits were as keen as his own, and that one thoughtless move on his part would bring them upon him. Below him, in the broad basin which he had first seen only a few minutes before when he had reached the crest of the ridge, was a river in which the water gleamed alluringly. The basin was not more than three or four miles wide and perhaps seven or eight miles long, and it was rimmed on all sides by hills and ridges and buttes as high and ragged as that upon which he was concealed. Brazo had no doubt that, even while he was looking down into the basin, certain members of the posse were also gazing down into it, seeking signs that would tell them of his presence there. Or perhaps members of the posse had been lying concealed among the ridges and hills for several days, waiting for him to ride down for water.

The basin was beautiful. There was a great deal of timber near the river, and there was green-brown grass spreading over the levels. A few cattle were feeding in the farther reaches of the basin. For a time, Brazo felt they were part of a herd belonging to some rancher in the neighbourhood, strays which would not be discovered until the next round-up. Then, scanning the timber near the river for the second time, Brazo saw a small log cabin on a level near the stream. There was a small corral near the house, a few small outbuildings, some horses, a buckboard.

Although Brazo spent several hours watching the cabin, he observed no sign of life around it. No smoke came out of the adobe chimney, no man or woman emerged.

It appeared to Brazo, gazing at the cabin from a distance of perhaps three miles, that the building was close to a grim, red butte that towered above it. It seemed to him that the butte stuck far out into the basin, like a narrow neck of land projecting into a sea, and that cabin was close to it. But around the cabin and at the base of the butte were many trees and a tangle of wild undergrowth, which created a dark background that Brazo's vision could not penetrate.

All along the northern rim of the basin ran great, rugged walls of granite, seemingly with no break in them. Beyond the buttes and towering above them were the peaks of mountains. Far westward, in a gigantic cave formed by the overhang of the granite wall of the buttes, was a deserted cliff-dwelling fashioned of adobe blocks. In the face of the butte were other dwellings which were carved out of the granite walls of the butte itself. Brazo knew that some of the walls were covered with crude decorations, pictures of serpents, mythical beasts and personages. There were symbols chipped out of rock with the stone hatchets of aboriginal sculptors; steps, ledges, terraces.

The white sunlight, pouring down into the basin, had bleached the huge boulders of the moraine at the edge of the basin until they seemed like skulls of prehistoric monsters. The sand along the river bed was also whitened, and the water gleamed in the sun like a broad silver ribbon.

Something more than silence reigned in the basin as Brazo crouched in the deep brush and gazed down upon it. A strangely solemn hush, an all-pervading sombreness, was in the atmosphere. Nowhere in the basin or above it was there sound or movement. There was no chattering of birds, no humming of insects, no rustling of leaves in the windless void that seemingly floated over the section. Brazo had the impression that he was the only living human in this great amphitheatre which had once been teeming with the people of a forgotten race.

And yet in the solemn hush was menace for Brazo. In the wild growth along the base of the buttes, men of the posse might be lying in wait for him. There was water in the basin, and they knew he and his pony would have to have water.

Brazo's tongue was parched; he knew Blinky needed water, yet he dared not travel the few miles that stretched between himself and the stream. He would have to wait for the darkness.

He did not move until noon. Then he squirmed on his stomach to the edge of a ledge behind him from where he could look down upon his pony in the gulch. When he observed that Blinky was grazing in apparent content, he squirmed back to the position in the brush just in time to see four horsemen riding down the western slope of the basin.

The riders halted about halfway down the slope and appeared to confer as they scanned the basin. Then they went on again, spreading out and examining the sand in various places as though in search of hoof tracks. One of the riders crossed the river and loped his horse

across an upland section which led to the base of the long butte. This rider sat for some time motionless on his horse in front of the deserted cliff dwellings, peering at them. He rode around in ever-widening circles away from the dwellings, peering into the sand. Another rider was working his way slowly up the sandy bed of the river. He, Brazo knew, was searching for signs that would tell him that the fugitive had ridden down to water.

The other two riders were circling the basin. They were an hour riding around it, and the first two vanished into the timber.

After a while, the two circling the basin and the two who had gone into the timber met at the base of the butte near the log cabin. They again appeared to confer, and then all of them rode to the house. Three of them dismounted and entered the cabin, and the third remained outside, evidently to watch the horses or to guard against surprise of any kind.

The men were in the cabin a long time, and when they emerged they talked with the fourth man. They nodded their heads toward the cabin and pointed in various directions, and from their manner Brazo divined that they were talking about him and wondering about the direction they should take in order to come upon his trail. The men finally mounted and rode around the corral, looking at the horses confined there; and after a time they seemed satisfied and rode away. They all went eastward, and Brazo watched them until they vanished over a ridge.

Brazo resisted an impulse to ride to the river for water.

There was a possibility that the men might ride only a short distance and return. Brazo's tongue was so swollen that he felt he could not have talked if he had tried, but he decided that he was more comfortable where he was than if he were dangling at the end of a rope somewhere in the distance toward Fort Apache.

The afternoon was long and hot, but Brazo, stretched out on his stomach on the ridge, watched the sun sink low over the mountains. When twilight came, he rose and went down the gulch to his pony. Blinky, violating the stern rules of his early training, was pulling upon his rope, trying to break away.

Blinky had stood it as long as he could, Brazo decided. He scented water and was eager to get to it.

Darkness had come by the time Brazo climbed into the saddle. He was amazed at the weakness of his legs. Blinky was still strong, however, and took him down the slope of the ridge without difficulty. He needed no urging, and when he reached the level floor of the basin, he loped steadily into the darkness toward the river.

Horse and rider spent an hour at the stream. Brazo had to fight the pony to keep him from overdrinking. For three or four hours after that, Brazo slept while Blinky grazed upon the grass of the level. Awakening about midnight, Brazo drank again from the stream, filled his canteen, watered Blinky, mounted him, and rode into the timber on the north side of the basin.

Deep in the timber, he halted Blinky and considered entering the cabin to search for food. He was convinced that the cabin had no occupant, or he would have made

himself visible during the day. It was possible, though, that the owner was away, and in that case, according to the unwritten law of the country, any visitor could help himself to what food he needed.

Brazo was deep in the timber when the moon rose, and when he at last saw the cabin in the centre of a little clearing, he sat in the saddle for some time before venturing to approach it. He decided the posse had not returned. They would, perhaps, return later, when they failed to find him.

He dismounted, tied Blinky to a small tree, and strode across the clearing toward the door of the cabin. At the door, he drew his gun. He entered, stood just inside the door, and peered about him. A shaft of moonlight entering a small window provided a subdued light. When Brazo's eyes grew accustomed to the shadowy gloom of the interior of the cabin, he saw that there was a bunk built against the northern wall, and that in the bunk was a man lying stretched out on his side, his eyes wide open.

Brazo's gun was in his right hand, and its muzzle was gaping straight into the reclining man's eyes. Brazo waited. The shaft of moonlight from the window was shining straight upon the man in the bunk, and Brazo observed that his face was white and emaciated, as though a wasting disease had stricken him. His eyes were bright, and he appeared to be trying to narrow his gaze so that he could see Brazo's face in the shadows that surrounded him.

He seemed at last to cease trying, for he smiled wanly and lowered his head to the pillow.

Brazo did not move. Silence followed.

At last the man spoke, slowly and distinctly, with a hint of derision in his voice:

"I've been hearing you for quite a while. You wasn't sure about what you'd find in here. I reckon you're the killer the posse is after!"

CHAPTER IV

THE man's hands were visible to Brazo, and they held no weapon. He did not appear to be interested in his visitor, for in the silence which followed his words he closed his eyes and seemed to rest.

"You are right; they are after me," answered Brazo. "You're sick, eh? I'm sorry I had to come in here."

The man opened his eyes and smiled.

"Glad to have somebody. Even a killer. Gettin' lonesome. Those fellows must have hustled you some. I suppose you saw them come in here. Sheriff Neil and two others. Neil said they had more than a hundred men out after you, besides some soldiers. They think you must have headed south. They're layin' for you all over the country. You'll never get out."

Brazo did not answer, and after a time the man spoke again:

"You're hungry, eh? Well, help yourself. There's lots of grub stacked around. The last time I was in to Cooney I brought back grub enough to last a year."

Brazo accepted the invitation. He holstered his gun, found food in a cupboard, placed it on a crude table which stood near the window through which the moonlight came, and ate silently.

He did not look at the man in the bunk, but felt he was being watched. The moonlight shone fairly upon

him, so that if the man was interested in his visitor he had time and opportunity to study him.

The man took advantage of the opportunity. He saw a lean, strong face in which there was no suggestion of evil. It was the face of a man who had learned the lessons of life in a grim school. There was no furtiveness in the eyes or the mouth. His movements were unhurried, deliberate even, although he must know that the members of the posse might return at any minute.

When he had finished, he straightened in his chair and smiled at the man in the bunk.

"Thanks. I feel better. I was beginning to think I'd have to take a chance on riding into a town for grub. You're in bad shape, eh? Anything I can do for you?"

"I'm sort of thirsty. Ain't had a drink all day. I spoke to Neil about it, an' he promised to get me some water. Likely he forgot about it."

"Some folks can only think of one thing at a time," said Brazo. He found a pail, went to the river and filled it with water; returned, set the pail on the table, found a dipper, and gave the man a drink. The latter smiled.

"Tasted as good as your grub," he said.

Brazo set the dipper on the table and went to the side of the bunk, where he stood, looking down at the man.

"You're not able to get out of bed, eh?"

The man shook his head.

"Not lately," he said. "Not for more than a minute or so at a time."

"Do you know what's ailing you?"

"It's my back, I reckon. Seems paralyzed. Gettin' worse every day."

"Had a doctor?"

"Can't do me any good. He's given me up. Last time I saw him he gave me a month. I reckon he was too generous."

"You got anybody around here to wait on you?"

"No."

"Hell!"

Brazo pulled a chair close to the bunk and sat in it.

"Got any folks?"

"None that I'd want to bother with me when I'm in this shape."

"It's likely you'll want them to know when you're through."

"Well—yes. But, somehow, in spite of the Doc, I sometimes feel as though I'm goin' to pull through this. No use botherin' folks."

"Hungry?" asked Brazo.

"Well—yes. I ain't been eatin' much. But I've been thinkin' all day that maybe a little toast an' milk would taste good."

"You tell Neil that?"

"Well—no. You see, I didn't want to bother him. He was in a terrible hurry."

Brazo got up. He found some wood in a corner and started a fire in a small cast-iron stove near the wall opposite the bunk. He had already seen a kerosene lamp on the table. He touched a match to the wick, and a yellow light flooded the room.

The man in the bunk watched him wonderingly. Lighting the lamp might bring the posse back. However, if Brazo had any such fear, there were no visible signs of it, for he worked deliberately with the stove, the bread, and the canned milk he found in the cupboard,

not even glancing at the door or the window as he moved about the room.

"Ain't you scared the light will bring Neil an' his men back?" asked the man in the bunk.

"I'm hoping it won't," Brazo replied, grinning. "Anyway, I've got to take that chance. Burnt toast ain't so good when a man hasn't done any eating all day."

While the sick man was eating, Brazo went out to Blinky, removed saddle and bridle, and slipped a hackamore on the animal, leading him to a grass patch and hitching him to a tree. When he returned to the room, the sick man had finished his toast and was lying back in the bunk. His face was grave as he looked at his guest.

"I ain't curious," he said, "but I'd like to know your name."

"I used to be known as Bob Adams. Later, folks got to calling me Brazo."

"Texas man, eh?"

Brazo nodded.

Brazo had paused just inside the door, and the light from the lamp shone strongly upon him.

"Hell!" declared the sick man suddenly. "You never killed the paymaster!"

Brazo was silent. He met the sick man's gaze steadily.

"Did you?" insisted the other.

"No."

"I knew it!" declared the occupant of the bunk. "It was them other jaspers! An' they blamed it on you! Why didn't you stay there an' have it out?"

Brazo told him why and the sick man nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it sure did look bad for you. Beats the devil what scrapes a man can get into!"

"You're talking too much!" declared Brazo. "You're getting all flushed up." Brazo walked to the table and put out the light. "I'm quitting you," he said from the doorway. "If Neil and his men haven't got sense enough to send someone here to take care of you until you get on your feet again, I'll do it."

"How will you do it?"

"Tack a note on a post, maybe," answered Brazo. "Anyway, I'll get somebody to come here."

"Couldn't hang around yourself, I reckon?" asked the man.

"No."

"Well, so long," said the sick man. "If you're dead set on gettin' somebody to come here to wait on me, you'll have to tell them my name. It's Jim Henley. An' this is Battle's Basin."

Brazo stepped out of the door into the moonlight. He had decided to stay in the basin, but he hadn't told Henley of his decision because he wasn't sure that Henley could be trusted. The sick have their vagaries.

Henley was sick, helpless, almost. His cabin was stocked with food enough to last for a long time. According to what Henley had said, there would be little chance of escaping the various posses which were out searching, and Brazo had little desire to repeat his experiences in hiding and starving. If he was to be taken, he would rather be taken here than out among the hills, enduring heat and thirst and hunger.

However, he did not mean to be taken. He had some

ideas that he had not mentioned to Henley. One was that, if he could find a place of concealment in the vicinity, he would stay around and take care of the sick man until the search "cooled" a little.

He felt that he might elude his pursuers if he made the effort, but he was reluctant to desert Henley. The man needed care. It was curious that Henley had been convinced of his innocence.

Brazo got Blinky again, mounted him, and rode deep into the timber. Again he tethered the pony in a grass plot, and once more, wearied by his long vigil, he dropped into the grass, rolled up in his blankets, and went to sleep.

He was awake with the dawn, exploring the timber, seeking a hiding place.

He had been right about the projecting butte, although it was farther from the cabin than it had appeared to be when viewed from the distant ridge that he had occupied during the day. All along the base of the butte was a wild, dense tangle of brush which extended some distance out into the level. The river, flowing westward out of the mountains, was broad and shallow along the base of the butte, its waters lapping the walls, penetrating the brush, and seeping into various deep recesses. There was a certain spot where spires and battlements of rock reared upward independently of the granite walls that rose above them, and it seemed to Brazo, as he studied them, that some cataclysm had separated them from the mother wall, cracking them, splitting them, shoving them out so that the elements might have their way with them.

The points of rock had yielded to the elements;

exposure to wind and rain and the action of sand whirling against them had worn them into grotesque shapes, had created space between them until, from a distance, it appeared they were many feet apart and that the water of the river flowed behind and around them.

Brazo urged Blinky to the water's edge and looked closer. The rocks were screened by the heavy brush that grew in front of them, and perhaps few men would have inspected them as Brazo was now doing. However, few men in Brazo's extremity had been in the vicinity, and Brazo's interest was acute, his need desperate.

He sat in the saddle, watching the lazy current flow around the base of the rocks. There was a steady westward movement, but presently Brazo observed that more water flowed out of the rocks than appeared to flow into them. In fact, it appeared there was a steady current flowing ceaselessly southward, at right angles across the river toward where he was stationed.

Convinced that the phenomenon would bear investigation, Brazo slid out of the saddle, trailed the reins over Blinky's head, and stepped out into the stream.

The river at this point was about one hundred feet wide, but the water was shallow, and there were great slabs of rock projecting upward. Brazo leaped from one rock to another until he stood on the opposite side on a rather wide ledge at the base of the butte. For a time, he moved here and there, peering into the recesses between the walls and spires; then he entered a broad cavern that was roofed over with rock. A ledge ran along its base, and he followed the ledge until complete darkness engulfed him.

A strong wind blew against his face. A wind laden with the aroma of sage!

Brazo continued along the ledge. He was tingling with eagerness. He knew that the scent of sage did not come from the cavern itself but from the outside country beyond it. That meant, of course, that the cavern must open upon the outside world.

He must have travelled several hundred feet when he came to an abrupt turn in the wall and in the ledge, and he was not surprised when a faint light burst upon him and he saw directly ahead of him, at a little distance, an opening in the cavern through which was revealed a broad, vast valley, emerald green and basking in the sunlight.

The ledge over which he had passed was wide enough for a horse to pass, and the water that ran beside the ledge was shallow and flowing slowly over a rocky bottom.

Brazo reached the outlet and stood on a rock high above the water to gaze at the valley. He had found his hiding place!

The valley was about a mile long and perhaps half a mile wide. Its floor was thickly covered with lush grass and trees, and the stream beside which he was standing ran through the centre of it to a gorge that was cut in a mountain wall on the northern edge. Mountain peaks rose all around, dead, sombre piles of volcanic origin, completely shutting the valley in from the rest of the world. It was evident that no one had ever penetrated here, for there were no signs of human occupancy.

Brazo smiled. He walked back over the ledge, crossed the stream, mounted Blinky, and rode him slowly through the cavern, emerging into the valley. He observed how Blinky's ears lifted as the new grazing ground burst upon his vision. A Paradise for Blinky!

Brazo rode around the valley for an hour or more. Then he returned to a spot near the entrance to the cavern, staked the pony out with rope of sufficient length to permit him to reach the water, and again went through the cavern, to emerge at last upon the bank of the stream from which he had first viewed the entrance to the hidden valley.

The sun was high as Brazo went through the timber toward Henley's cabin. Twice, as he walked, Brazo paused and carefully scrutinized the surrounding ridges. He saw no riders. Perhaps Neil and his men had ridden south, as Henley had suggested. It made little difference to Brazo, now, which way the riders went. He, himself, was not going anywhere.

CHAPTER V

BRAZO felt that Henley was studying him, appraising him, valuing him. For every time Brazo entered the cabin Henley watched him. His gaze followed Brazo around the room. If Brazo stood by the stove, cooking, Henley would lie motionless in his bunk and regard him with half-closed eyes. Brazo could feel Henley's gaze. Henley was interested in everything Brazo did. No movement that Brazo made while in the cabin escaped Henley's eyes.

Henley's watchfulness was not critical. It was anything but that. It was admiring, grateful, appreciative, pleased watchfulness. And yet there was something more in it, an emotion more subtle and profound, an evanescent slyness which gleamed in the depths of his eyes and would not be expressed.

Brazo had caught that gleam many times and was baffled by it. It wasn't derision, it wasn't mockery or amusement. After a while, Brazo gave up thinking about it, ascribing it to a mental malady that Henley's disease had brought upon him.

He didn't care, after all, how Henley looked at him. He had been with Henley for more than three months, now, and he meant to stay until Henley died or got better. And he was certain that Henley would not get better. Slowly he got worse. He was thinner, weaker, more helpless.

Henley was a tall man, almost as tall as Brazo, and Brazo estimated that in good health Henley had been lithe, rugged. However, Henley was ten years older than Brazo, but the beard he wore was black, as it had always been since he had permitted it to grow. His hair, too, was black; and it had been so long when Brazo came to stay with him that Brazo had cut it with some shears that he had found on a shelf.

Brazo, too, had grown a beard. Not quite so long as Henley's, it strongly resembled the latter's. On the day that Brazo had cut Henley's hair, the latter produced from a corner of his bunk a bundle of papers tied with a string, from which he drew a daguerreotype and showed it to his guest.

"I had that taken over in Cooney, by a man who was takin' pictures there one day when I drove in for supplies. I was feelin' pretty good then. That was about nine years ago, a year after I came here." He looked keenly at the picture and then at Brazo. "You look like I looked then," he added; "enough to be my twin brother!"

For a time Brazo decided that he had discovered the mystery of Henley's constant watchfulness. It was in his resemblance to the man Henley had once been. Later he changed his mind and became convinced that Henley was merely trying to determine what sort of a man he was. Henley was probing him, perhaps a trifle cynically, in an attempt to interpret his character.

For what reason?

Brazo could not decide. Later, however, meditating upon the situation, he conceded that in Henley's position he, too, would be doing some wondering about

the character of a man who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere, branded as a killer. He would wonder why the killer persisted in staying month after month when he must know that the search for him must have practically ceased. Yet, perhaps, if he liked the killer as well as Henley appeared to like him, he would not wonder so much, after all. He would want the man to stay, and he would very probably reveal that desire in much the same way that Henley had revealed it.

Well, Brazo meditated, he was staying, anyway. And he meant to stay until Henley died.

There was little to do except to fill the sick man's wants. And those wants were few. Henley spent most of his time sleeping. When he wasn't sleeping, he would draw the bundle of papers out of its corner in the bunk and write. What he was writing, Brazo did not know or care. Brazo would sit for hours upon end on a fallen log in the timber, from where he could scan the ridges around the basin. At such times he felt the completeness of his isolation, and a yearning for the companionship of his fellow men would grip him. Yet he had no impulse to desert Henley. He liked Henley; had liked him from the beginning. He knew Henley would die soon, and he wouldn't desert him.

There were times when he wondered much about Henley and about the cabin and the basin. Henley had few cattle, not more than fifty. He was living alone, with no neighbour within a hundred miles. He apparently sold no cattle; he owned only a few horses; he had no visible means of getting money. And yet the interior of the cabin was stacked with food supplies of every description; and there were other supplies in one of the

outbuildings. Henley had told him that, on the occasion of his last trip to town, he had laid in supplies for a year. Obviously, Henley had means that were not visible.

However, Henley's affairs did not provoke Brazo's curiosity, and the long, lazy days dragged by without any questioning on the latter's part.

No members of the posse revisited the basin, although Brazo was careful to keep to the shelter of the timber during the day and only ventured into the cabin when he was assured that he would not be seen from the ridges that surrounded Henley's dwelling place.

Brazo kept Blinky in the hidden valley. Sometimes, upon days when his presence was not required by the sick man, Brazo would saddle and bridle Blinky and run him for several hours across the green floor of the little basin, to keep him in condition against a day when he might need him. Brazo also rode on many trips of exploration. He sought out various small cañons which appeared in the granite walls that rimmed the place; he climbed the sloping walls of dry gorges that ran deep into the mountains; he scaled tall, ragged walls, and twice almost lost himself among some towering, distant peaks.

Henley grew weaker and seemed to watch Brazo more than ever. And of late there had come a certain wistfulness into his gaze. It appeared to Brazo that Henley wanted to talk with him about something of importance, but that he was holding off, apparently doubting the wisdom of confiding in his guest.

Brazo could not fail to understand that something was disturbing Henley, but whatever was on the man's

mind would have to come off without Brazo's assistance. The months passed without Brazo asking any questions that would indicate he had any interest in Henley's personal affairs.

Brazo wasn't interested in Henley's secrets, in his past, or in his problems. He had found the man in need of care, and he was giving him care until he would have no further want of it. That was all.

Henley's eyes were exceptionally bright when, one morning in late summer, Brazo entered the cabin. He raised himself in his bunk and stared long and intently at his guest.

"There ain't no use of me tryin' to fool myself, Brazo," he finally said. "I'm goin' to cash in."

"We all got to do that, Henley."

"Sure, I know that. What I mean is that there ain't no hope of me ever gettin' well. I ain't goin' to die sudden, but I'm sure goin'. Every day I get a little weaker. What you goin' to do when I cash in?"

"You'll hang on quite a while yet, Henley."

"You know better, Brazo. You can't fool me. I'm just curious to know where you're goin' when you leave here."

"When I left Bain's Camp, I was thinking of New Mexico—Lincoln County. It's likely I'll get there some day."

"You got any folks?"

"Not any."

For some minutes Henley silently watched Brazo.

"You're an odd cuss, Brazo," he finally said. "Most young fellows would be sort of impatient, stayin' on here with a sick man. They'd be wantin' to hit town once in a

while to raise hell." He again studied Brazo. "You don't like that sort of thing, eh?"

"I've raised hell," returned Brazo. "More than I should have, I suppose. But while I was doing it I couldn't see any sense in it. Lately, I've been avoiding town and saving my money."

"You like money?"

"I'm not getting gray hair worrying about it," smiled Brazo. "I feel a lot better when I haven't got too much of it."

"How much is too much?"

"Well, I've got about six hundred in my belt," answered Brazo. "I get sort of tired dragging it around. If I had more, I wouldn't know what to do with it. I'd be like some people, I reckon: I'd put it in a bank and then camp alongside the bank and watch it. It would sure be annoying to have so much money that you'd have to feel that way about it."

"You drink, Brazo?"

"Some. Whisky and me never formed any sort of friendship. Two drinks and I don't want any more until next time. And 'next time' ain't the next day, either."

"What do you think about women?" asked Henley.

"I've never done much thinking about them. Sure, I've seen some. A man does." Brazo blushed. "I've maybe got some fool ideas about women, Henley," he added, "but I've got them and I can't change them. I like to look at a good woman. I ain't got any use for the other kind." He met Henley's gaze challengingly. "Maybe that was the way I was raised," he went on. His face paled.

"You're thinkin' of them damned Indians that killed

your folks," said Henley. "Well, if a man likes his mother, he thinks of her. Sort of judges other women by her, eh?"

Henley watched Brazo.

"You've been stayin' in the hidden valley for quite a while, Brazo," he said. "Likely you've poked around in there some. Did you find anything interestin'?"

"Nothing unusual."

Henley smiled. He was watching Brazo's face.

Brazo was sitting on a bench beside the table. He saw Henley half turn from him, and thinking the man was through talking and intended to lie down again, Brazo got up and walked to the door. He stood in the doorway a few minutes, gazing out into the shimmering sunlight; and then he heard Henley's voice and turned to look at him.

Henley was again sitting up in the bunk. His eyes were narrowed and they were gleaming and alert. A small object which at first appeared to Brazo to be a sphere of dark cloth was lying in his lap. Brazo's vision had been slightly blurred from gazing into the sunshine of the basin, and when his eyes finally became accustomed to the light of the room, he saw that the object in Henley's lap was a small buckskin bag, round, about six inches in diameter, its top tied tightly with rawhide thongs.

Brazo's gaze was questioning, but he said nothing.

"Look here, Brazo!" Henley had said.

Now he said nothing, but was studying Brazo's face with his alert eyes.

Brazo did not move. His face had not changed expression.

Henley continued to hold the buckskin bag and continued to regard Brazo intently.

"Well?" said Brazo finally.

"Do you know what's in this bag?" asked Henley. He seemed amazed that Brazo had not betrayed excitement or interest.

"Yes," answered Brazo. "That is, I think so. I can guess. It's gold."

"You're right," said Henley. "It's gold. Nuggets!"

He opened the bag and scattered the precious metal upon the coverlet. Meanwhile, he watched Brazo with a peculiar intent slyness that brought a derisive smile to Brazo's lips. Henley's fingers played with the gleaming pebbles, but he did not remove his gaze from Brazo's face. Nor, after the first glance, did Brazo look at the gold. He was more interested in wondering why Henley had chosen to be dramatic.

And now Henley appeared to be somewhat confused, although there was a strange gleam of elation in his eyes.

"You don't appear to be much interested, Brazo," he said. "I show you a bag of gold worth thousands of dollars, and you stand there as unconcerned as if I had dumped out a handful of gravel!"

"I'm glad you've got it, Henley. But what did you expect me to do? I never could get exactly excited over looking at money that belonged to someone else. I expect it ain't natural."

Henley tapped some of the nuggets but kept his gaze on Brazo.

"This is your gold, Brazo," he said. "I'm payin' you for stayin' here an' takin' care of me."

Brazo smiled. "If you wasn't sick, I'd knock hell out of you, Henley. I haven't been taking care of you, I've been taking care of myself. I've been here several months, loafing and living like a king while waiting for the sheriff and his men to kind of ease off and give me a chance to get out. I'm not taking any pay from you. That's settled."

Henley said nothing in reply. He gathered the nuggets and replaced them in the bag, drawing the rawhide thongs tight and tossing the bag into a corner of the bunk when he had finished with it. Then he sank back in the bunk, placed his hands back of his head, and watched Brazo. Henley's cheeks had a little colour in them now; his eyes glowed; he appeared to be pleased.

"You're an odd cuss, for sure, Brazo," he said at last. "Seems you ain't got no greed or curiosity. You see that bag of gold. You won't take it. You don't ask where I got it, an' you don't seem to be interested in knowin' if there's more where that came from. If I cashed in right now, you'd have to take that gold, wouldn't you?"

"Not if I knew where I could find your folks."

"Well, you'll know that. But not right now. I ain't certain. Somehow, I feel better, an' mebbe I won't die right soon, after all. You've seen me writin', I reckon. You've never asked me what I've been writin' about. You ain't interested, eh?"

"What you are writing is your business, Henley."

Henley seemed to meditate. For a time he watched Brazo intently, and then he smiled.

"There's some things I've got to tell you, Brazo," he said. "I've lived here about ten years, an' I ain't had

anybody to talk to. An' I've wanted somebody. When you first come here, I knowed right away that you was an odd cuss, an' I was hopin' you'd stay. It's the odd cusses that amount to somethin'; an' a man has got to be pretty odd if he don't get fussed up when he sees a bag of gold nuggets. Most folks think that money is everything. There's men that would cut my throat for that bag of nuggets. Well, what do you do when you see it? You don't even look at it the second time. There was nothin' to prevent you grabbin' that bag from me an' ridin' away from here. Why don't you do it? You don't do it because you've already found out that there's bigger things than money. It takes some men the biggest part of their lives to find that out, but you ain't very old, an' you've found it out already. You've thought things out. You're on to life. No matter what would happen to you, you wouldn't be stampeded. You think before you do things. You're slow an' soft-spoken an' cool, an' I reckon you're a bad man in a fight. I've been sizin' you up some."

"Shut up, Henley; you'll talk yourself to death!"

Henley observed that Brazo was embarrassed. He laughed softly. Brazo's embarrassment proved exactly what Henley was thinking—what he had thought all along—that Brazo was modest, that life hadn't hardened him. He had a man's body, a man's presence; he knew how to take care of himself, and other men would respect him for the quiet manliness that would be visible to them. And yet, beneath the intense masculinity of him were the impulses, the warm generosity, the quick sympathies of a boy. Yes; Brazo could take care of

himself, even in this country where a man's existence depended upon wisdom and rapid, ruthless action.

"I've been sizin' you up some," repeated Henley. "When I saw you standin' in the light the first night you came into my shack, I knowed you hadn't done that killin'. The reason I knowed was that you looked about the way I felt when, in my home town, I found folks was accusin' me of a murder that I hadn't done!"

"That's why you're here, eh?" said Brazo. "You're hiding."

Henley nodded. "Nobody knows where I am—that is, nobody I don't want to know. I've changed my name. What you've seen me writin' is a sort of sketch of what happened to me. It's the truth, but I reckon the circumstances of that killin' point so plain to me as the killer that I'd never be able to prove my innocence. I ain't goin' back to try. I'm stayin' free as long as I can.

"Well, that's part of what I've been writin'. The rest is about you: about how you stayed here and took care of me, and how I know you didn't kill the paymaster. I'm writin' this to someone you don't know. When I find I'm goin' to cash in, I'm goin' to name names. Then you'll know. But not before. I'm not takin' any chances on gettin' caught. Time enough to name names when I'm sure. Then it'll be too late for them to jail me.

"An' listen, Brazo! You'll find more than that in what I'm writin'. I've showed you some gold. What I showed you ain't a hundredth part of what I've got cached!"

Henley lifted himself to his elbows and stared at Brazo. He now seemed to have complete confidence in Brazo, and it was evident that he was on the verge

of revealing his secret. His eyes were brighter than Brazo had seen them; his colour was high and his voice hoarse with excitement.

"I figure I've got a million, Brazo!" he declared. "I got it out of the hidden valley. I came upon it one day by accident! Man, I kicked it out of a rotted vein, where it had been layin' for centuries! Free gold! For days after I uncovered the vein I was plumb crazy!

"But I never handle it. It's goin' to you, an' to someone else that I like. You'll find it all in what I've written an' in what I'm goin' to write. I know you're square, Brazo, an' I'm trustin' you!"

"You're goin' to go to sleep right now!" declared Brazo. "We'll say you got plenty of gold. But what of it? If you keep on at the rate you're goin', you'll bust something and cash in mighty quick. Sure, I'll do whatever you say. But take your time, Henley. I'm leaving you for a little while. When I come back, you'll be asleep."

Abruptly, with a smile at Henley, he strode from the cabin.

Henley was queer. He'd had trouble, and the end of things for him was not far away, now. A million, eh? A pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Henley had found it and was not to enjoy it. He felt a deep sympathy for Henley. Innocent, and living like a hermit. Rich, and no way of enjoying his riches. Sick, facing death, and striving to keep his identity a secret so that the hand of the law might not grasp him in life. Concerned for someone, as yet unnamed, whom he liked and to whom he wished the gold to go when he died.

Why didn't that someone come out here with Henley?

A member of Henley's family, probably, not caring a great deal for him—obviously—but possibly writing to him occasionally; giving him some written words now and then to lean upon. Slender support for a man in exile.

But Brazo felt he should not judge. He knew very little about Henley and less about the mysterious person who was to receive Henley's gold following his death. Brazo hoped the person would prove worthy.

Brazo's interest in Henley's gold was almost negative. He wanted none of it. It was as safe with him as if it had been in a bank vault.

Brazo spent the day in the hidden valley. He had left things handy for Henley, and there was little need of staying at the man's side, for Henley's wants were few. And so Brazo did not go near the cabin again until dusk. He entered the door and heard no sound from Henley. He walked close to the bunk and looked down into Henley's upturned face. Henley was dead. He had evidently died peacefully, without knowledge of what was happening, for his eyes were closed and calm serenity was in the lines of his lips.

CHAPTER VI

FOR many hours Brazo sat in the darkness of the cabin. A consciousness of loss assailed him. He had grown to like Henley. He did not light the lamp or build a fire in the stove. He kept thinking of Henley and of the life the man had lived in this lonely spot, away from the one person he "liked," because someone had misjudged him.

He sat in the cabin until daylight. Then he again walked to the bunk, pulled back the bedclothing, laid his head on Henley's breast and listened. There was no doubt about Henley being dead. He was rigid, cold as marble.

Brazo covered him, went out to one of the small outbuildings, found a pick and shovel and went a little distance into the timber. There he laboured for several hours.

Returning to the cabin, he gently lifted Henley and carried him into the timber. When he again returned to the cabin, he bore only the pick and shovel. These he threw into the outbuilding.

He stood for a long time at the edge of the timber, scanning the ridges around the basin. He was alone.

He did not reënter the cabin until noon. Then he built a fire, made coffee, and opened some canned food. He had baked biscuits several days before, and there were a few left.

His meal over, he looked at Henley's bunk. In a corner he saw the buckskin bag and a bundle of papers with a string around them. Henley's gold and his writing. The bag and the papers Brazo placed on a shelf behind various cans and boxes. He would examine them later. Just now he was interested in cleaning up the interior of the cabin, responding to a vague impulse that was provoked by a subconscious desire to rid the cabin of the atmosphere of death.

It was late afternoon when he finished. He had scrubbed the floor, cleaned all the shelves, polished the stove. The bedclothes were on a line outside, to be aired.

Just why Brazo had prepared the cabin for future occupancy, he could not have told. He stood in the open doorway, wondering.

He had done what he could for Henley, and now there appeared to be no further reason for his remaining in the vicinity. But still he had no inclination to leave.

He took Henley's bundle of papers from the shelf, laid it on the table, opened it, and spread the papers out so that he could read them.

There was a deed to Henley's land. One hundred and sixty acres. Henley had bought the land from a man named Mason, who had proved on a government grant. The deed had been recorded.

There was a bundle of letters. The envelopes were addressed to "Mr. James Henley" in a woman's handwriting. Brazo studied the writing but did not open the bundle.

"The person he liked, I reckon," was Brazo's thought. The writing was clear and bold. "If she's anything like that, she's a straight-shooter," was his conclusion. He

pushed the letters aside and picked up a pad of several closely written sheets which he knew was Henley's literary effort. For an hour he pored over the manuscript. It was addressed to "Ella."

Henley had related the story of the experience that had resulted in his being sought on a charge of murder. The details were similar to those of the affair that had happened to Brazo. Brazo was not interested in the details. They were sordid, and Henley had escaped the law. But there was a certain hopelessness and wistfulness in the recital. A longing, a yearning.

I'd sure like to be with you [had been written in one place]. It gets pretty lonesome here. If I could see you once, for only a minute, I'd feel better.

Brazo frowned at the page. "Seems she's sort of cold-blooded or she'd have hustled here to give him that look—whoever she is!" he declared mentally. He drew the bundle of letters to him again and scrutinized the writing.

"How can a man tell about writing?" he asked himself. "If she was as bold as her writing, she'd have come here to see him. But if she was close to him, maybe they was watching her, and she couldn't come without running the risk of being followed. In that case, she did right in staying away."

I have found a lot of gold. About a million. Before long I'm going to make arrangements to get it into a safe place, where you can get hold of it. Right now it's in a pit which I have dug under the floor of my cabin, right under my bunk. If anything happens to me you'll know where to find it. I haven't been feeling any too well lately, and so one of these days I'm going to send this letter to you. Then you can come here and get the gold.

There was a great deal more about Henley's lonesomeness, and various references to intimate details of life between Henley and "Ella" which Brazo did not understand. And then appeared this:

You'll be twenty-two to-morrow. You ought to be quite a big girl. You was growing fast when I left, and you looked a great deal like Ma looked just before she died. I'm glad Ma wasn't alive to know what happened to me. She had enough trouble with Dad, didn't she? Or maybe you don't remember?

Well, I'm glad to hear you are going to try to come here. If you could let me know when you are coming I'd try to meet you. I won't send directions until you are sure.

Farther down the page and apparently written some days later was this:

I ain't feeling so good to-day. Weak. Can't get out of my bunk. Ain't had a drink of water all day. Funny thing happened a little while ago. Sheriff Neil and some of his men came here looking for a man they said had killed the paymaster, a fellow named Major Pitrick, of the United States Army. They was more interested in catching the killer than they was in me, for I asked Neil for a drink and he plumb forgot to get it for me. Well, after dark I kept hearing someone around the cabin. I knowed it was the killer, and I wasn't surprised when he came in. I thought maybe he'd kill me too. But he didn't. He got me some water and some grub for himself and me. While he was sitting in the light I studied his face. I knowed he wasn't a killer, and I asked him. He said he hadn't killed Pitrick. Anybody would know he didn't. He got in a deal something like mine. He's a regular guy, good-looking and clean-looking.

There was more about Henley's physical condition. This had been written much later:

This Brazo man is a sticker, and he's square. To-day I showed him a bag of the gold and he didn't move an eyelash. He wasn't much interested. I told him I had more gold. Even that didn't feaze him. I'm trusting Brazo. I've got to trust somebody, and I'd rather trust him than anybody I know. It's got so I can't get to town to ship

the gold, and so I've got to leave it here. If I die sudden, Brazo will see that you get it. But Brazo's been so good to me that I want him to have half of it.

Brazo don't know my real name, and he won't know where to find you if I die without telling him. But when I find I'm going to die, I'm going to write down my name and yours so that Brazo can find you. I'm going to have Brazo mail this letter for me one of these days, for Brazo has changed so much that if the guys that's hunting him was to see him now they wouldn't know him from Adam. He looks a lot like me when I left home. There's another thing——

That was all. Evidently Henley had grown wearied just at this point and had put his writing away. He had not been able to continue it, for death must have come upon him in his weariness.

Well, there was little for Brazo to do now. Ella's letters were here, and it should not be a hard task to find her and communicate with her.

He drew the bundle of letters to him and examined the envelopes, seeking a postmark. However, evidently feeling that the postmarks would provide a clue to the Ella's whereabouts, Henley had obliterated them. The letters themselves bore no word to indicate the post office from which they had been sent. They mentioned no city, town, or village. They began with the greeting: "Dear Jim."

Not even Henley's real name was disclosed. "Ella" must have been warned against using it. And Henley himself had not had time to record his real name in his writings. Henley had waited too long!

Brazo looked the letters over thoroughly, reading every one of them in the hope of discovering Ella's identity. When he finally tied them together again his brows were wrinkled in disappointment.

Carefully he examined all of Henley's possessions. The last article he examined was the daguerreotype. He hardly expected to find anything illuminating upon that either, because it had been taken in Cooney. He found nothing. And then he sat for a long time with the picture in front of him on the table, studying it.

He smiled oddly at Henley's picture. He remembered how Henley had watched him and questioned him. He particularly recalled how Henley had tested him by exhibiting the bag of gold.

Well, there it was, now. Under the floor of the cabin was a million dollars in gold. Henley was gone; there wasn't a chance in the world of finding "Ella." The gold was his, if he wanted to take it. He smiled at Henley's picture.

"You old son of a gun!" he said; "you knew what I would do, didn't you?"

CHAPTER VII

BRAZO, of course, would stay at the cabin, for there was nothing he could do away from it. He would have to wait until the mysterious "Ella" came. According to what Henley had written, he expected her, so she must have apprised him of her intention of visiting him. Brazo did not know where he could find Ella, and he had no intention of running aimlessly around the country seeking her. Also, he was not yet ready to leave the basin. He had heard nothing of the activities of the minions of the law who must be seeking him, and although he might possibly escape from the country, he was not inclined to take the chance. Finally, he felt it was his duty to stay. Henley had expected him to stay.

Studying Henley's picture, he was reminded of Henley's words: "You look like I looked then. Enough to be my twin brother!"

Brazo got up, went to a small mirror that was hanging on a wall of the cabin, and stood there for some time comparing his face with the face in the daguerreotype. He was forced to confess that there was a remarkable resemblance.

Brazo's hair had grown long. It covered his ears and swept the collar of his shirt. His beard, too, had grown long, and was a faithful replica of Henley's.

Brazo turned from the mirror and gazed meditatively

at a corner of the cabin where, upon the wall, hung some clothing that had belonged to Henley. Brazo examined the clothing. He found a fairly good suit, two shirts, and a Stetson. These garments were almost new, and it was quite evident that they had been worn only a few times. Henley had probably bought them shortly before his illness had sent him to bed. The coat, vest, and trousers were a dark gray, the shirt the same colour, though of a slightly lighter shade; the hat was cream coloured. These, Brazo decided, were the clothes Henley wore on his visits to town.

If Brazo was to stay in the cabin, he would have to impersonate Henley. There had been no visitors since Brazo had come, but that fact was no assurance that some of Henley's neighbours might not appear at any time. Henley had told him that he knew few people in the section, but there were certainly some who had seen Henley and observed the peculiarities of his personal appearance. These people Brazo must deceive.

Brazo disrobed and arrayed himself in Henley's clothing. He replaced his own boots, cartridge belt, and pistol, and later got his leather chaps from a rock ledge in a cavernlike overhang in the hidden valley and hung them on the wall of the cabin. His own clothing, which might be recognized by Bain or the stableman, and the saddle he had used while riding Blinky, he carried into the valley and concealed.

He went back into the timber and scattered some boulders indiscriminately over the ground where he had buried Henley. The bag of gold, Henley's writing, and the bundle of letters from Ella he concealed behind a broken board in the east wall of the cabin, shoving

them back into a corner where no prying eyes would discover them.

That night Brazo spent in the cabin. It was the first time in months that he had passed a night indoors, sleeping, and he awakened in the morning entirely satisfied with his experience.

Days went by and nobody appeared in the basin. Autumn came, and Brazo, growing bolder, began to range farther from the cabin. He rode one of Henley's horses and used Henley's saddle. His hair and beard had grown so long that he felt, gazing sometimes into the mirror, he had grown to look more like Henley than Henley himself.

Then he rode into Cooney. The seventy-mile trip occupied two days, and he reached the town late in the afternoon of the second day, dust covered and eager for sight of a human face.

Cooney was a mere collection of shanties at the foot of one of the Mogollons. A stage station was there, and a store and a saloon. Brazo drank twice in the saloon, and he observed that the proprietor looked keenly at him and nodded rather uncertainly. Then, while Brazo drank, the proprietor walked to the front of the barroom and stared at the horse Brazo had hitched to the rail in front of the building. The horse, a roan, bore an "H" branded upon a hip. The proprietor sauntered back and grinned at Brazo.

"Feelin' better, eh?" he said. "Last I heard of you, you was sick. Forgot who was tellin' me. Well, you ain't a lot sick now, eh?"

"Not any," replied Brazo. "But I reckon I had a pretty narrow squeeze."

Brazo left the saloon in some elation. He had been identified as Henley without having to declare his identity. He went into the store and bought some tobacco, and the owner, a man named Thomas, squinted his eyes at him and smiled.

"Same brand, Henley?" he asked.

Brazo had used several packages of tobacco left by Henley, and he nodded, adding: "An' you can put in half a dozen packs of that Virginia leaf."

"Grub holdin' out?" asked Thomas.

"Got enough to last me six months yet," returned Brazo. "You'll recollect I was sort of sick when I was here before. Thought I wouldn't be able to make it back here soon. An' I wasn't. So I packed enough home to last me."

"You sure looked peaked," agreed Thomas. "But you've got all over it. You're healthy enough now." He walked to a box behind the counter and drew out a letter which he passed over to Brazo.

"This here has been waitin' for three or four months," he said. "I'd have sent it over to you, but there ain't been nobody travellin' that way. An' I thought you'd be in for it."

Brazo pocketed the letter, after first glancing at the address and observing that it was in Ella's handwriting. All the rest of the day and the night Brazo spent in Cooney. He played cards with some men in the saloon until after midnight, then sought a bed in a room above the barroom. Shortly after daylight, he was again in the saddle, heading for his cabin.

He now felt that there was little danger of his true identity being discovered. He had not inquired about

the killing at Bain's Camp for fear of bringing attention too sharply to himself. Therefore he heard nothing, for no one had volunteered any news.

Once again before winter set in Brazo went to Cooney. This time he went in for supplies and drove the buckboard. Again he stayed a day and a night.

He shot plenty of game during the winter, and enjoyed himself as well as a man could who was forced to live alone. He had cut enough wood for the winter and had it piled against the rear wall of the cabin, and he was snug and contented when the north winds and the snows swooped down upon him.

There had been nothing in Ella's letter to tell him where it came from. It began, "Dear Jim," and ended, "Ella."

Its contents caused him mild astonishment.

I am glad to hear you have discovered gold [he read in one place]. That will certainly make things much easier for you. [And in another place:] I am coming to see you just as soon as I can. There is nobody to stop me now, and it is terribly lonesome here. I suppose you have changed a great deal, but of course you would in ten years. I have changed too. My hair is getting brown; that is, it is slowly turning. It has been almost yellow. Do you think I could live there? I don't see why I couldn't. I don't like dances or crowds of any kind; and I think I should like to ride a horse—if I could get one that wouldn't run away with me. I have not heard from you in a long time. If I do not hear soon, I am coming there to see you, anyway. I suppose, if I get to Cooney, there will be someone there who can tell me how to get to your place. I got the tintype picture you sent. Imagine you with a beard. You will seem like a stranger, I am afraid. When I come, I will make you shave it off. Answer as soon as you can.

ELLA.

P. S. Do you think the wind and sun there would spoil my complexion? I do not tan easily.

Brazo pored long over the postscript.

"I reckon she's outdoors a lot," was his thought. "She don't care for dances or for crowds, and she thinks she would like to ride a horse. Well, if that's the way of it, I reckon she won't have to worry much about her complexion.

"She's twenty-two, eh?" he reflected, which indicated that he remembered what Henley had said about her. "Twenty-two. She sounds little. And she's had yellow hair, only now it's turning brown. That would make it changeable, according to which way the light struck it." His face lengthened. "She'll take it mighty hard, finding out that Jim has died."

Brazo had no means of knowing when Ella would arrive. That she would come some day, he was certain, and so, when the first mild days of spring appeared, he busied himself with his ax in the timber. With a team of horses and a drag he hauled straight young logs to the house and began to erect an addition. The addition was not large, yet it was big enough for a bedroom, for which purpose he intended it. April had come before it was completed, but Brazo was proud of it. He laid a floor in it; he plastered it inside with adobe, and spent two days carrying water from the river to scrub it to a condition of cleanliness which he thought would appeal to a woman.

He had made one trip to Cooney during the winter, and had ordered various articles from the storekeeper. Late in April, he made another trip and returned with the wagon heavily loaded with furnishings for the addition. And then, after the addition had been made ready for occupancy, he stood in the doorway and regarded it doubtfully.

He had been assuming that Ella would live in the cabin. But would she?

She would expect Henley. Henley was her brother, of course. That must be the relationship. She would be glad to live in the cabin with her brother, but what would she do when she discovered that the cabin was occupied by a stranger?

"She's got to live somewhere," Brazo decided. "She can't live in town and she can't camp out. She can't stay here alone, with me sleeping outside and no one around to look out for her. I reckon there ain't no other way."

Brazo now began to watch the Cooney trail. Twice each day he rode to the crest of the southern ridge and gazed into the vacant southern distance. Often he rode several miles southward, toward Cooney. She would come by way of Cooney. She would have to come that way, because all the letters she had received from Henley had been postmarked "Cooney," and she would know that there could be no other town nearer.

But May passed and she did not appear. The mild, warm winds came and touched the valleys and levels with their magic. The days were slumberous, the nights breathed romance.

Brazo began to believe she would not come. The wind and the sun would ruin her complexion. Maybe she had got as far as Cooney, and observing the desolation and squalor of the place had turned back in disgust. Brazo would not have blamed her very much. Cooney was not much to look at.

But Brazo had not really given her up, in spite of his knowledge of the unattractiveness of the country. There

were things here that were more interesting than anything she had been accustomed to, no matter where she lived. Could there be a better atmosphere? Could there be nights more beautiful?

Brazo was oppressed with a terrible loneliness, which had been growing upon him as night after night he sat on a log at the edge of the timber near the cabin and gazed at the stars and at the faintly luminous line that marked the crest of the ridge, southward, over which Ella would have to come on her way from Cooney.

In two weeks he had not gone to his bunk before two o'clock in the morning. Anticipation had provoked him to a strange restlessness. His thoughts had been so continuously upon the girl that he had given her a character, built upon her letters to her brother, which he now idealized and loved. There were times, upon just such nights as the present one, when his mental picture of her grew so vivid that he could almost see her, standing near him, smiling at him.

She *was* little. Not too little, though. As a matter of fact, her head just about reached his chin. And her hair was like strands of finely spun gold gleaming in the starlight.

Brazo smiled in self-derision.

"That's what thinking about one thing does to a man," he reflected as he sat on the log at the edge of the timber and gazed at the shallow waters of the river glittering in the luminous haze of the brilliant stars. The river was not more than a hundred feet distant from Brazo. It came from a point along the dark, shadowy walls of the butte, doubled sharply, and ran under the corral fence, and then swept outward into a giant

horseshoe curve, and back again, close to the timber. Then it flowed outward again, following the centre of the basin until it vanished far down near the deserted pueblo village.

"A man thinks and thinks. And he gets to believing the things he thinks. That's what makes some folks believe their own lies, I reckon. It's likely she ain't at all what I think she is. I've been convincing myself that she's beautiful. Maybe she is. But it's more likely she ain't. Anyway, I'll be giving her a square deal."

He had been resting his rifle on his knees. Now he placed it on the log beside him and drew out his pipe and tobacco. He filled the pipe, tamped the tobacco down until it was level with the top of the bowl, and reached into the breast pocket of his shirt for a match. He had been looking down at his pipe as he filled it, and now, with his fingers exploring the pocket, he looked up.

The pipe dropped from his hand; his fingers released the matches they had seized. He stiffened, drew a great breath of astonishment, and sat rigid, staring.

The girl was coming. She was arrayed in white, as he had many times seen her in his mental pictures, and she was not very tall. Plainly against the dark background of the long grass of the basin and the velvet blue of the sky at the crest of the southern ridge, he could see her. She was coming rapidly toward him, for she had evidently seen the light in his cabin. She was on foot, and running!

Brazo got up. He stood, leaning forward, amazed, incredulous. His first thought was that his imagination had summoned a vision of the girl, but when he saw that her hair was streaming wildly about her shoulders, and

that she was running heavily, as if she had come far and was near exhaustion, he knew that he was staring at no picture of the imagination but at a real, living girl.

Yet he was still amazed. He still stood rigid, watching her, wondering how the girl had got this far into the wilderness without a horse and why she should be running so frenziedly when almost at the end of her journey.

And then, when the girl was still perhaps a hundred yards from the river, he saw the silhouette of a horse and rider become detached from the dark background of the ridge and leap against the blue arch of sky.

Brazo's muscles tightened and swiftly relaxed. His lips went into straight lines, and he leaned over and grasped the rifle he had previously laid upon the log. A strange girl running wildly toward him out of the night might be a spectacle to bewilder Brazo momentarily, but his brain worked keenly enough now, realizing, as he did, that the man's pursuit could mean nothing but evil to her.

Yet Brazo did not intend to shoot until he was certain of the man's intentions. The latter was coming fast, shortening the distance between himself and the girl with amazing rapidity, so that he was only a few yards behind when the girl, staggering in apparent weakness, approached the edge of the stream.

It was evident that the girl was aware that the rider was near her, for she did not turn as she reached the water, but started to run through it, sending a silver spray high into the air.

But the man was now at her side. He had slid off his horse with the animal still in motion, and had leaped

forward, cursing. His arms went around her. She was lifted bodily and carried back from the water, kicking, scratching at the man's face, fighting silently.

Her fingers must have lacerated him, for he cursed violently, suddenly released her, pushed her slightly away from him and then struck heavily. The girl fell, soundlessly, into a pitiful heap in the long grass near the water.

The man stood erect. For a space of several seconds he was motionless, seeming to lean a little forward as though peering down at the girl. Then Brazo's rifle, rigid as the log beside him, spat a crimson lance straight at the man's chest. The man straightened, groaned, and pitched forward, flinging his arms wide as he fell, face down, in the grass.

CHAPTER VIII

THE rider's horse had moved toward him as if curious over what had happened. For a short time Brazo stood at the edge of the timber, peering about him into the luminous haze in an effort to discover if the rider had been alone. He saw no other rider; heard no sound. Then he placed his rifle on the log, drew his six-shooter, and moved forward. He went first to the man, turned him over and looked at him. He was Wolf Wilson, an outlaw who was notorious in the section. He was tall, smooth of face, dark. There was a long white scar on his left cheek which had evidently been made with a knife. Brazo's bullet had gone through his chest above the heart. He was still breathing, but he would die, of course.

Brazo drew a gun from a holster at the man's right side and slipped it into a pocket. Thereafter, he did not look again at the man, but went to the girl and knelt beside her.

She was lying flat on her back, her arms outstretched, her body relaxed. The light was not good and so Brazo could not determine if the man's blow had marked her. But there was light enough for him to see that she was arrayed in a white dress of some soft, flimsy material. The waist, evidently in her struggle with the man Brazo had shot, had been torn almost entirely across; the huge rent disclosing her shoulders and her breast.

Her hair was in wild disorder, and her skirts had been drawn up, revealing her legs from the knees down. She wore black stockings and slippers.

These details of her attire Brazo observed while he was lifting her in his arms. She was unconscious and obviously injured, and Brazo wanted to get her to the cabin as quickly as he could.

He did not look again at her assailant as he carried her across the shallow waters of the stream and walked with her toward the cabin. She was passive in his arms, every muscle was limp and inert, and her face was as white as the satiny skin of her shoulders and breast. She was not heavy, and Brazo carried her as he might have carried a child.

When he reached the cabin, he carried her into the addition and placed her upon the new bed that he had brought from Cooney. How he knew that she was the girl who had signed the name "Ella" to the letters to Henley, he could never understand, but it seemed to him that it must be she, for he had waited so long for her.

After placing her on the bed, he went into the main cabin and got the lamp, carrying it into the addition and placing it upon a small dresser. He stood over the girl for an instant, gazing at her in the light from the lamp. The torn waist had become disarranged again and he gently covered her bare shoulders with it, and thrilled oddly when his fingers came into contact with the soft flesh.

He did not linger long after he observed that her breathing was slow and regular. He went out into the kitchen, brought in a wash basin filled with fresh water,

and a towel. He soaked the towel, squeezed it until it was merely damp, and laid it upon her forehead. To do this, he had to brush her hair back. It was wavy and abundant and in colour a glistening golden brown. On the left side of her head, just above the ear, was a lump. That was where the pursuer's fist had landed.

The girl did not respond to the damp cloth, so Brazo got a tablespoon from the kitchen, dipped it into the fresh water, lifted her head, and forced a few drops between her lips. There was no response, and for a time Brazo sat on the edge of the bed, impotently watching her. There was no doctor in the country, so far as he knew, and even if there should be one, he could not leave the girl to go in search. The rider who had pursued her might not have been alone. Also, the girl did not appear to have been greatly injured, although, of course, her assailant had struck hard.

She was breathing with some difficulty, now, and Brazo wondered what a doctor would do. His thoughts went back to a time when his mother had fainted with a doctor in the house with her, and he remembered how roughly the doctor had torn his mother's dress open and removed her corset, grumbling meanwhile something about "women harnessing themselves in these damn things!"

Brazo hesitated. He had been a youth when the incident he now remembered had occurred, and he felt now, as he had felt then, vastly embarrassed and ashamed. Yet there was some of the ruthlessness and the professional unconcern of the physician in Brazo as he finally reached over and unbuttoned the girl's waist.

He got the corset off and was gratified when the girl

drew a long, shuddering breath, as of relief. Then, resolutely, he removed her slippers and stockings, tucked a pillow snugly under her head and covered her to the chin with the bed quilt.

Then, for a long time, he stood beside the bed, watching her.

She was more beautiful than his wildest dreams had made her. Perhaps the dignity of sleep may have accentuated her serenity, but Brazo felt certain that she would lose none of her placid calmness with animation. There was a revelation of her character in the words she had written to Henley: "I do not tan easily." Confidence. Something in the set of her lips expressed it. There was a suggestion of self-reliance in the shape of her chin and in the smooth, unwrinkled forehead.

Brazo stooped and gently touched a firm, satiny cheek. He could not resist that impulse.

Then he went out of the room and stood for some time in the main cabin, his arms folded, one hand caressing his chin. The lamp from the addition threw its yellow rays across the floor and upon the north wall of the room in which Brazo stood, and some of the reflected light disclosed objects near him.

The cabin did not seem familiar to him. Something had gone out of it; something had come into it. A new atmosphere enveloped him. The yellow light from the lamp in the other room seemed to fill the entire cabin with a soft radiance. The bareness which had offended him seemed to have yielded with magic suddenness to a satisfactory fullness. There was grace in the lines of the crude table. The benches were rough, but they were symmetrical and substantial. The shelves,

teeming with their burden of canned goods, canvas sacks, canisters, and dishes, suggested opulence. Even the cast-iron stove contributed something to the homey atmosphere.

But although all these things were good, there was something else. Brazo filled and lighted his pipe and sat on the edge of his bunk, smoking while he tried to define it.

"Sure," he said finally, aloud, "it's her!"

He was strangely elated. He felt that all the romance for which he had hungered during the empty years through which he had roamed since the final breaking up of his father's home had come to him suddenly, to submerge him with happiness. He gravely regarded the pipe in his hand and observed that it was shaking.

He got up, knocked the ashes into the stove, and stood in the open doorway, gazing out into the starlit basin.

He was excited, eager; for once in his life his capable lungs seemed unable to exhale quickly enough the air that he drew into them.

"Lordy!" he ejaculated. "I'd never have thought that a woman could do that to a man!"

He turned back into the cabin.

He had bought some cloth from the store at Cooney; some white muslin which some day he had meant to use as curtains for the windows. He had put off the task of hanging them because he had expected to be apprised of Ella's coming. He had also bought stove polish, a tablecloth, and a roll of grass matting.

For the next hour, working in the subdued light, he did his best to change the appearance of the cabin, to give it a final touch of completeness. And when he had

finished he stood near the table, now covered with the first cloth that had ever been on it, and smiled with satisfaction.

"That ought to make her feel at home!" he decided.

He silently entered the bedroom addition and critically regarded the girl. She was breathing regularly, without effort, and some colour was stealing into her cheeks. When he observed a slight fluttering of her eyelashes, a queer panic seized him, and he escaped from the cabin, suddenly realizing that he had forgotten the girl's assailant.

He went into the timber, found his rifle, and walked across the level to where the tragedy had been enacted. While he had been in the cabin, the moon had come up from behind the mountains, and he was amazed to discover that both man and horse had vanished. He could see no sign of horse or rider in the basin or upon the moonlit ridges that surrounded it.

One of two things had happened, of course. The man had friends who had come and taken him away, or he had not been badly wounded and had helped himself off.

How the man had escaped made little difference to Brazo. He was curious about the girl's experiences before she had suddenly appeared in the basin, but no doubt, if she cared to, she would tell him what had happened whenever the impulse seized her.

He wasn't worried about her assailant; his concern was entirely for the girl. She had been unconscious for a long time, and if she didn't revive presently he would take her to Cooney. Once in town, he would send for a doctor. He would certainly not leave her in the cabin to be further abused in his absence.

Before he returned to the cabin, he stood for a long time at the edge of the timber intently examining the ridges and the basin. When he entered the cabin, he closed the door and barred it.

Leaving the doorway, he crossed the cabin and went to the door leading into the addition. He halted on the threshold and stood rigid, though almost yielding to an impulse to take a backward step.

The girl had recovered consciousness. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, her hair hanging in heavy folds over her bare shoulders, her bare legs and feet dangling, her eyes wide with a strange mixture of apprehension and bewilderment.

She had tried to gather the bedclothing around her, but had succeeded only in getting one corner of the quilt over her breast; and as she stared at Brazo she was pulling, ineffectively, at the quilt, which had somehow got tucked under her and would not come free.

Brazo's embarrassment was as great as her own; greater, in truth. For while Brazo could not summon his voice in this crisis, hers came cold and sharp, seeming to add frigidness to the reproach and accusation of her eyes:

"Will you be good enough to tell me who you are and how I got here?" she demanded.

CHAPTER IX

I'M Bob Adams," answered Brazo, "and I carried you here."

Brazo's voice was very gentle. And yet, having recovered from his amazement over seeing her sitting on the edge of the bed when he expected to find her still unconscious, and having also become convinced that her injury was not as serious as he had thought, there had come into his voice a lightness which the girl seemed to interpret as impertinence. She could not know that relief was responsible for it.

"Oh," she said. "So you are Bob Adams! And you carried me here! From where, may I ask?"

"From where you were when I found you," replied Brazo. "That was where you fell when a man hit you behind the ear."

The girl's eyes grew larger. There was still bewilderment in them. "When a man hit me?" she questioned. And then she seemed to remember, for she shuddered and exclaimed: "Yes, yes! I had escaped from them! One of them followed me! A man named Wolf Wilson The brute! Oh! I could have killed him!"

"I tried to, ma'am. I shot him just above the heart with a rifle. I sure thought it would finish him. But I just came from there, and he's gone. He's either pretty tough or some of his friends dragged him away."

"Then you are not one of them?" she asked, appearing to make a second inspection.

"I never heard of a man named Wolf Wilson, ma'am," he lied. "No; I reckon I'm not one of them."

"Then who are you?"

"Bob Adams. Better known as Brazo."

"I mean what are you doing here?"

"I live here."

"And where is 'here'?"

"Why, in Battle's Basin, ma'am. Right here in this cabin."

She sat silent for an instant, appearing to consider his words. Then some of the new colour left her cheeks.

"Did you ever hear of a man named James Henley?" she asked.

Many times Brazo had mentally enacted this scene. He had decided that he would break the news of her brother's death as gently as possible. But now, with the girl looking at him in a manner that seemed to command instant and direct answers, he realized that he could not hope to equivocate.

"Yes."

"I was trying to reach his place," she said. "Does he live in Battle's Basin?"

"He did live here, ma'am."

"Here! Do you mean in this basin or in this house?"

"In this house."

"Why, then——" She paused, caught her breath, seemed to brace herself. "Do you mean that he has left here?" she added steadily.

"Jim Henley is dead, ma'am," he returned gently. "He died some time ago."

The girl's body went limp; she bowed her head and sat there dejectedly gazing at the floor. Brazo was relieved to perceive that she was not crying. Her pallor indicated, however, that the news had shaken her. She must have loved her brother, after all. Brazo was accusing himself of taking snap judgment against her. Once, he had condemned her for not hastening to Henley.

After a while, the girl appeared to have accepted the blow that had been dealt her. She sat erect again and looked at Brazo, and the latter felt that he was again being subjected to a searching inspection. Her eyes, which were hazel gray and glowing with a strange mixture of wonder, inquiry, and doubt, grew soft with embarrassment as he watched them.

"Will you please tell me what you know about my brother?" she asked.

"Why, sure, ma'am. But there ain't a great deal to tell. I came here about a year ago. There had been some trouble just over the border in Arizona. A United States Army paymaster had been killed, and I was accused."

"Were you guilty?" interrupted the girl.

"No. But I had to pull my freight. I got away. Several days later I reached this cabin. I came at night and found Jim Henley sick. I stayed here with him until he died. He just wasted away. I reckon that's about all."

"Why did you stay?"

"I had to, ma'am. There was men out hunting me. Then, after Jim died, I stayed on because I had to. There was no way of finding you, and Jim expected you." He got up, went into the main cabin, and returned, silently handing the girl Jim Henley's writing.

He went out again, opened the outside door, and stood for a time scanning the moonlit country. When he felt that the girl must have finished reading, he closed the door again, barred it, and appeared in the doorway of her room.

She was sitting where he had left her. The letter was crumpled in her lap and she was crying. Brazo turned away.

A few minutes later, she called, and Brazo again stepped into the room.

She looked up at him.

"You were good to Jim," she said. "I want you to know that I appreciate what you did for him. Jim died before he had time to tell you his real name, didn't he?"

Brazo nodded.

"His real name was James Wainright. I am Ella Wainright. Oh, I wish he had let me know that he was sick!"

The tears came again, and Brazo was dismayed.

"Now, ma'am, there ain't nothing to cry about. Jim was well taken care of. And you hadn't ought to worry yourself, after what has happened to-night. You just stretch out there and have a good sleep. To-morrow you'll feel a whole lot better."

The girl straightened; into her eyes came a gleam of apprehension.

"You—" she began, tremulously—"you are not going away?"

"Not far, ma'am. I've got a bunk over against the wall, there." He pointed. "You don't need to be afraid. There ain't any chance of Wolf Wilson and his friends bothering you. And if you're scared of me, why, I reckon

you can bolt your door. I built it that way purposely."

"You expected me to come?" she asked, astonished.

"Why, sure."

"You waited for me—is that it? Why, there was nothing to stop you from taking all of Jim's gold! I would not have known anything about it!" She gave him a quick, appraising glance.

"I reckon that's right, ma'am."

"Are you certain the gold is where Jim says it is?"

"It's here, ma'am."

"Why? Aren't you interested?" This time she looked longer at him.

"Why, I don't know. I reckon I am interested. But I wasn't interested enough to lug it off until the real owner came."

"You built this room—this addition—yourself?" she asked.

Brazo nodded.

"After Jim died?"

"Yes."

"For me?"

Brazo nodded.

"Why?"

Brazo flushed, but gazed straight at her. "I thought maybe you would want to stay here a while," he answered.

If she had now asked him why he had expected her to stay in the cabin, Brazo could not have given her any reason expect that he had wanted her to stay. And that reason, he knew, would not have been sufficient.

Ella did not answer, nor did she ask the question. But Brazo observed a tint of red slowly rise from her

throat to spread and deepen until her cheeks were crimson. He knew then that she was thinking of the question she might have asked, and of the corset and the stockings.

She drew the quilt closer about her.

"I thank you for your thoughtfulness," she said coldly. "Will you please close the door when you go out?"

Brazo bowed. His face was as red as hers. He closed the door. He had taken only two or three steps into the main cabin when he heard the bolt on the bedroom door snap with a sound that seemed almost eloquent with defiance.

CHAPTER X

BRAZO went outside the cabin and stood in the cool night air. In the presence of the girl, he had been embarrassed; now he was filled with an emotion that bordered upon elation. Yet there was a certain gravity in him.

"She ain't to be trifled with!" he told himself as he stood at a corner of the cabin. "I reckon I *am* a box head for not thinking she might not like to live here alone with a man. And she certainly was some flustered when she happened to get to thinking about who had undressed her. Do you think she would have died if I hadn't taken that cussed corset off?"

He asked the question of the millions of stars that glittered in the sky above the basin, but he found his answer in further consideration of the girl's condition.

"I reckon she wasn't in any real danger," was his mental decision. "But how was I to know? And I wasn't intending to mention it to her."

When the thought occurred that he had not mentioned it, he felt a pulse of perturbation. She'd leave him now, perhaps, just for that! He'd made a mess of things!

He kicked savagely into a windrow of dust and saw it erupt at his feet. The contact of his booted foot with the dust had created a thudding sound; but a second

thud which he heard was not caused by his boot. Listening intently, he heard a sound as of someone running; and he leaped around the cabin, away from some heavy brush that grew in a great, long clump near where he had been standing, drawing his six-shooter as he moved. He had cleared some ground in the vicinity of the spot where he had built the addition, and when he reached this open space he saw a man running away from the cabin.

The man was some distance away; too far for accurate shooting with a pistol, but Brazo turned sideways, crooked his left arm and rested the heavy weapon on it, sighted quickly and pulled the trigger.

The man fell, got up again and ran on. Twice more Brazo fired at him. He missed, for the man continued to run. He disappeared into a depression and reappeared almost instantly, riding a horse. He was half a mile away by this time, but the moonlight was so strong that Brazo could see him wave a hand with a derisive motion.

Brazo grimly reloaded his gun.

"One of that Wolf Wilson gang, I reckon. Hellions!"

He knew of their reputation; had met some of them. He knew Wolf Wilson, and had been disappointed when he had discovered that the rifle bullet he had shot from the edge of the timber hadn't killed him. He had not admitted his knowledge of the men to Ella for fear of frightening her still further. He was now certain that one of the men had been standing under a window of the addition, listening; and, of course, if he had been listening, he must have heard the conversation about the gold.

There was another thing to be considered. If the man

had listened long enough, he must have heard Brazo tell Ella his real name, and had probably overheard the conversation about the killing of the paymaster.

Brazo heard Ella calling to him, and he went around the cabin and found her standing in the outside doorway.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I—I thought someone had shot you!"

Brazo observed that her face was very white and that she was holding tightly to one of the door jambs as if a sudden weakness had seized her. She had drawn her torn waist together and was holding it with one hand. She was trembling.

Brazo laughed.

"Shucks. I reckon I sure am a box head, shooting that way and not thinking that maybe you'd be scared. But it wasn't anything. Not much. A coyote. I was scared he'd go to yowling and disturb you."

She did not speak, but stood looking at him. Suddenly she turned and went back into the cabin. Brazo heard the bolt on the door of her room click as she shot it.

Brazo did not go to his bunk. Instead, he got his rifle and pipe and went into the timber close to the house, where he sat until daylight.

He was frying bacon when he heard the door of the girl's room open. He did not look around until she spoke, greeting him with a low "Good-morning."

"I'm famished!" she declared, looking at the bacon. "And you know how to fry it crisp. And the coffee!" She smiled at him.

Somehow, she had repaired the rent in her waist. Her hair was looped in soft coils and waves. Her eyes

were shining and her colour was high. She went to the open doorway and stood, gazing out.

"This is wonderful!" she declared. She saw the water of the river gleaming in the sun and she nodded to it.

"I think I remember now," she said. "That is where it happened, isn't it? I was just stepping into the water when Wolf Wilson reached me." She went outside, and Brazo saw her take a clean towel from a line he had stretched from a corner of the cabin to a tree. He stepped to the door and grinned at her.

"The water is clearest over by the butte," he suggested. "But don't be too long, or the bacon will get dry and cold. It's a lot better when it's just a bit moist."

He had the table set when she returned, and she took a chair opposite him with a grace and unconcern that could not have been more natural if she had been sitting opposite him in that manner for years.

Brazo kept both his admiration and his elation invisible.

"She's thoroughbred!" was his thought.

She ate lightly, and when she finished she folded her hands in her lap and looked straight at him.

"I suppose the sensible thing to do would be to get Jim's gold, load it into a wagon, and get to the nearest town as quickly as possible," she suggested. "Would you advise doing that?"

Thinking about Wolf Wilson and the man who last night had obviously been listening to their conversation in the addition, Brazo reluctantly replied that he would.

"This is no place for a woman," he added.

"Then it wasn't a coyote you were shooting at last night," she said.

"I reckon you know it wasn't, or you wouldn't have suggested taking the gold away right away," he answered. "Part of it was the truth, anyway," he added. "I didn't want you to get scared." He smiled gravely at her.

"You knew all along that it wasn't a coyote," he went on. "You knew it was a man."

She nodded.

"Twice, while you were talking, I heard someone moving outside, near one of the windows. He must have brushed against the wall; the noise sounded like that."

"Yes, he was listening," said Brazo, as if to confirm his mental decision of the night before. "If he was listening, he must have heard me telling you my real name."

"I expect he did." Her gaze was steady. "So you have another name," she said.

"After your brother died, I took his name," explained Brazo. "We looked alike. If you look at that tintype he had taken in Cooney soon after he got here, you will see what I mean. I didn't like the idea, and I had no notion of trying to fool you when you came. You see, I felt I had to stay here. There was nobody around to know the difference. Jim wasn't very well acquainted, and so I didn't have any trouble. I've been over to Cooney a couple of times. Without any explanations, they took me for Jim."

She seemed to understand that he had done this thing for her as well as for himself. She got up, went into the addition, returned with the daguerreotype, sat down beside the table and studied her brother's face, occasionally looking up at Brazo.

"The resemblance is remarkable!" she finally declared. "But," she went on, hesitating a little and regarding him with narrowed, appraising eyes, "there is some difference, of course. Jim wasn't a bold man. You are."

Brazo wondered if she was referring to his action in undressing her. Shucks. That hadn't been boldness. But, of course, she didn't know how embarrassed he had been. And of course he would never tell her, because that would mean reopening a subject that she had dismissed last night. He had bungled. He had antagonized her right in the beginning.

"No," she added, still seeming to study him. "You are not like Jim. I don't believe you really resemble him. I am sure that, if you were to remove your beard, there wouldn't be any resemblance at all. Your chin is more aggressive than Jim's. Your face is longer, your forehead is higher, broader, and there is a different expression in your eyes. Jim was gentle and self-effacing and quite self-conscious." She shook her head with a slow, negative motion, meanwhile still appearing to study Brazo.

"If I hadn't read what Jim wrote about you, I should be inclined to be afraid of you," she went on. "You have a way of going right ahead and doing the things you want to do without any consideration for the opinions and desires of other people. For example, you built that addition. Last night, when I regained consciousness, I heard you out here tacking up curtains, putting down this new matting, polishing the stove. Whatever made you think I would stay in this cabin with you?"

"Why, ma'am, you had to stay some place!" he answered, so embarrassed that he did not look at her

but sat staring at the new matting. "I reckon, now that I come to think about it, that I didn't have any thoughts at all. I just fixed up, thinking you would like it. I wanted to have you comfortable."

There followed a long silence. Brazo continued to gaze at the matting, while Ella watched him, her gaze severe.

"Where did you learn to put up window curtains by tacking them as you would tack a carpet?" she asked.

He grinned shamefacedly. "I never put up any before," he returned, still not looking at her.

"That is evident. They are terribly crooked, too."

"There wasn't any light in here," he defended.

"And of course they had to be put up last night!" she said. "You couldn't wait until morning."

He had no defense for that.

Her voice was low and impersonal, as if she had no interest at all in the curtains but was merely calling his attention to them because there seemed to be nothing else to talk about.

"To polish a stove correctly you have to spread the polish on evenly," she said. "Is that the first time you ever polished a stove?"

Brazo nodded.

"You have had no experience whatever in keeping a house?"

"I've spent most of my time out in the open, ma'am."

"Yet you knew that women like to have a house look neat," she said.

"I expect that's right, ma'am."

She sat watching him. And while he still gazed at the matting on the floor, filled with amazement that he

should feel so embarrassed in her presence, she smiled enigmatically and looked at her torn waist. Then she got up and walked around the room, examining the shelves, peering into corners; halting before Brazo's bunk.

"How did you sleep last night?" she asked.

"Pretty well." Brazo did not look up.

She glanced at the bunk, which had not been slept in, and again she smiled.

She walked to the door and looked out. The basin was slumberous, and beautiful in its sheath of green. The great buttes above the river rose to majestic heights, the peaks of the mountains beyond them providing a mighty background. A faint breeze sweeping into the cabin stirred her hair, and with a feminine movement which brought a sudden ache into Brazo's throat she tucked in some stray wisps at the nape of her neck.

"Jim must have loved this place," she said suddenly.

"I reckon he did, ma'am."

"He must have loved it to have lived here ten years," she added. "And I believe I can see—I can understand —why. It's so quiet and peaceful. And so beautiful. Where is Jim's—Jim's——" She did not finish.

"In the timber, ma'am. It's quiet in there."

"May I see?"

Brazo got up and followed her outside. She permitted him to take the lead, and he took her to the spot where he had buried Henley.

In anticipation of her coming, he had mounded the soil and had erected a small wooden cross. He did not linger there, but returned to the cabin and stood in the doorway, watching her.

She was gone a long time, but when she came toward him out of the timber, she said nothing.

Brazo stepped aside, and she entered the cabin. She went into her room and closed the door. Brazo left her there and went into the timber, seeking the fallen log upon which he had sat last night watching her as she ran toward him from the darkness of the basin.

He sighed, filled his pipe, and smoked. And smoking, he meditated.

Well, what had he expected? He didn't know. He knew, now, that he had expected nothing. His hopes had been wild ones, with no foundation except his own grotesque fancy. In one respect only had they turned out as he had expected—she was as he had pictured her.

She was afraid of him; she distrusted him; she disliked him. Would he require more proof of her dislike than a recollection of how she had criticized his efforts to make the cabin habitable for her? She hadn't wanted to come right out with it, to express her dislike; she had taken it "out" on him by expressing disapproval of the curtains, the stove, and the matting. She'd do as she had suggested, of course. She'd have him load Jim's gold into the wagon and take it direct to Cooney, where it would be shipped. She'd go with the gold, and that would be the last he'd ever see of her. She would take all the gold, though; he wouldn't keep any of it, not even if Jim had wanted him to take it. After she'd gone, he'd get out of the country.

He did not see Ella again until just before the noonday meal. He was standing beside the stove mentally debating an impulse to call to her when he heard the door of her room open.

She came into the kitchen and seated herself in a chair near the table, and he did not turn until an errand sent him to the cupboard. Then he met her gaze and observed that she was watching him.

"Your work here keeps you very busy, doesn't it?" she asked.

"Well, no; it's just the other way around."

"But you haven't been in the cabin all morning. You must have been doing something."

"Sitting on a log in the timber," he said. "Thinking."

"Oh. Thinking." She gazed out of the window; then at her hands, which were clasped in her lap. Apparently she spoke to them, for she said slowly, almost gently: "He was sitting on a log, thinking."

She looked up at him. It was a glance; nothing more, and yet he felt he had been again appraised.

"They were ponderous thoughts, of course?" she suggested.

"They were about you." Brazo flushed.

"In that case, you may tell me what they were, I suppose?"

"Sure. I'd been thinking about what you said about getting away from here. You'd better go. We'll load the gold into the wagon right away. I'll drive you to Cooney and see that you get started right and that the gold is safe. I can see, now, that you can't stay here. You don't trust me, and you don't like me. So you'd better leave."

She smiled.

"What were you intending to do after I left?" she asked quietly.

"I was heading for Lincoln County when I came

upon Jim," he answered. "I'll keep going until I get there, I reckon."

"What about your share of the gold?"

"Shucks. I don't want it. I never intended to take it. It belongs to you."

She was silent, and her gaze was meditative as it rested on Brazo, who would not look at her. Meeting her gaze was like looking at the sun. She was twenty-two, and that made her three years younger than he; and yet in manner she was years older. In addition, there was wisdom in her that he had not yet acquired, and there was a strong, maternal atmosphere about her, a calm and contemplative gleam in her eyes which made him feel like a child in her presence.

"When I was in the timber to-day I came upon a fallen tree," she said. "It was lying near the edge of the timber, right near the spot where Wolf Wilson caught me. Its surface is worn smooth, and it looks as though someone had been sitting on it a great deal. Do you remember it?"

"That's where I was sitting last night when I saw you coming," answered Brazo.

"Have you sat there often?"

"A whole lot. First I used to sit there and watch for the sheriff's men. That wore off after a while, after I became Jim Henley."

"But you still continued to sit there?" she said. "That was habit, I suppose?"

"Not entirely," confessed Brazo, reddening again. "After Jim died, I used to sit there and wait for you to come."

"You felt certain I would come?"

"Yes."

"And I did come," she said. "And after I came—after you had been sitting there for months, waiting for me, you did not feel interested enough in me to ask what had happened to me. You were not interested enough to ask me how it happened that Wolf Wilson was pursuing me?"

"I expected you'd tell me when you got around to it," he returned.

She tapped with the tips of her fingers on the table edge.

"You are not a very curious person, are you?"

"I put in a lot of my time trying to mind my own business," he replied soberly.

"Well," she said, suddenly lowering her lashes, "you succeed remarkably well." She sat very still and went on quietly:

"Nothing much happened to me, I suppose. I got off the stage at Cooney. There was a man there who was sitting on one horse and holding the reins of a led horse. I asked this man where I would find my brother, Jim Henley. He told me Jim had sent him to meet me, and that I was to get on the led horse and go with him. He carried my suitcase.

"I went with him. Of course, I don't know where we went, for soon after we started it began to get dark. We rode the biggest part of the night and got to a cabin near a river.

"There were several other men there. I asked them where Jim was, and they said Jim would be along presently. They put me into the cabin but kept my suitcase. I felt there was something wrong, but I did not

dare ask any questions. It was Wolf Wilson who had taken me to the cabin, for I heard some of the other men speak to him.

"I didn't go to bed, but sat up, listening. I heard the men talking about Jim, and about some gold that Jim had brought to Cooney. Jim had paid for a lot of supplies with gold nuggets. The men must have thought I had gone to sleep, for they talked a great deal. They looked through my suitcase and read some of Jim's letters to me, which I had brought with me. Of course I knew they were trying to find out something about Jim's gold, and they thought, perhaps, that Jim might have mentioned it in one of his letters to me.

"Toward morning they went away and I opened the door of the cabin. I knew I had to get away. When I opened the door, I saw a man sitting on the ground near the door with his back against the wall of the cabin. They had evidently left him there to guard me. But he had gone to sleep.

"I got out and found a horse. I rode down the river into some timber. Jim had written me that Battle's Basin was straight north from Cooney, so when the sun came up I rode east, remembering that, during the early part of the night before, when I had been riding with Wolf Wilson, the moon had been at my back. Of course, that meant that we had been riding west.

"I tried to keep close to the river, but there were places where that couldn't be done, and so, after a while, I got lost. But I kept going east. Half a dozen times during the day I heard and saw some of the men. They were searching for me, but I eluded them until just after dark.

"Then I had to cross an open stretch of level ground, and one of the men saw me. It was Wolf Wilson.

"After that things are just a little difficult to remember. I rode as fast as I could for a good many hours, I thought. The man who had seen me was getting closer. Then, riding a ridge, I saw a light at a distance. That was the light in this cabin, I suppose. I headed my horse toward it. He had got down the slope of the ridge and was running through the grass when something happened to him and he stopped. Then he went on again, limping. He couldn't go as fast as I could walk, so I got off and started to run.

"I ran a long while, and thought I would be able to get away. Then I heard Wilson's horse behind me. I felt him seize me. That must have happened just as you saw us. I have no recollection of him hitting me with his fist. Everything just went black."

Brazo said nothing. Ella got up and walked to the door. She turned when she reached the opening and looked back at Brazo.

"Are you afraid of Wolf Wilson and his men?" she asked.

Brazo met her gaze, and now there was no embarrassment in his eyes.

"Meaning that if I ain't you'll stay here?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered quickly, decisively.

"Then you'll stay," returned Brazo. He got up, walked to the door, and held out his hand.

"Shake, ma'am," he said gently, gravely.

Glancing quickly at him, Ella observed that he was not looking at her, but that his gaze was upon something outside. He dropped her hand and stepped over the

threshold of the doorway, where he stood motionless, his arms hanging rigidly at his sides, his back to her.

Ella stepped forward and peered over his shoulder. Not more than a hundred feet distant were two riders. They had evidently come out of the timber, and they were headed straight toward the cabin. They were cowboys, for they wore the picturesque regalia of the period, and they were lean, bronzed, capable-looking. Ella observed rifles in their saddle sheaths; she saw the sombre stocks of heavy six-shooters projecting from the holsters that swung low on their hips. She feared they might be some of Wolf Wilson's men, but she could not be sure until they came closer. And so she stood, staring intently at them as they continued to approach.

CHAPTER XI

THE riders drew their horses to a walk as they came close to the cabin, and when they were within a dozen feet of Brazo, they halted and dismounted, dropping their reins to the ground.

Both the riders were young, and both were grinning as they moved forward toward Brazo. Ella Wainright thought their grins were strangely arrogant, for she could see no occasion for mirth. Then she observed that Brazo was also smiling and that his rigidity had gone.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Brazo. "It's Lafe Anderson and Clay Hardin!"

Friends!

For friendship was speaking. It was in the tone of their voices, in the broad smiles that were wreathing their faces; she perceived it in a certain reserve and embarrassment which kept them from betraying too much delight in the meeting. They evidently had not expected to see Brazo at the cabin, and if their friendship had not been sincere, they would have been more vociferous. They were amazed to see a young woman with their friend, and yet, after the first glance, they did not look at her, but talked with Brazo and turned their flushed faces away from the doorway.

Ella went to her room. It was not until she felt herself

trembling that she realized how fearful she had been that the two men would prove to be members of Wolf Wilson's band. She was certain she would have recognized them if they had been Wilson's men, for she had seen all the men who had been with Wilson on the night she had escaped from the cabin to which they had taken her.

Now she was relieved and reassured. For she was aware that kindred traits drew men together, and she felt that Brazo's friends were like him. In fact, she already had been given evidence that they were. For, like Brazo, they had been embarrassed in her presence, and she had little doubt that they would be as tractable as he had been.

She came out of her room presently, and, standing well back from the outside doorway of the cabin, she saw the three men seated upon the smooth log at the edge of the timber. There was no laughter; their voices were low; they were serious.

She watched them for an hour, and when she finally saw Brazo rise and start toward the cabin, she again went to her room and closed the door. She did not want Brazo to know that she had been watching him.

She heard Brazo enter the cabin and step across the floor. Then his knock.

She opened the door and confronted him.

He was smiling and his manner was apologetic.

"Those boys are my friends," he said. "The tall one is Lafe Anderson and the other is Clay Hardin. I rode with them for three years at Slim Hellman's Bar H ranch near Tombstone. They're good boys. They're drifting, looking for a job. I didn't introduce them

because I didn't know whether you'd care to meet them. They're bashful, not knowing much about women. I expect, if I'd have introduced them, they couldn't have said anything to you. Likely they'd have stood there, bobbing their heads and trying to swallow their tongues."

"Well," she said, "it's a mighty good thing they have a friend to do their talking for them!"

"I expect I ain't much better at talking than they are," answered Brazo. "Maybe I ain't so much scared of you, having been around you longer. But they're good boys, ma'am. They're square, and they ain't scared of anything on legs!"

"Yet they are afraid to meet me," she said.

Brazo scratched his head. "Well, they seem to be, for a fact," he admitted. "You see, they ran out of grub. I wanted them to come up here and eat, but they insisted that I bring some grub to them. They claim they don't want to bother you, ma'am."

"Why, how ridiculous!"

She walked past Brazo and went straight to the edge of the timber, to the log upon which the two men were sitting. She stopped near them, and both rose and stood, their hats in hand, their faces red and their eyes drooping.

"Are you boys afraid I am going to bite you?" asked Ella.

Lafe Anderson, the taller of the two, a young giant with blue eyes and skin bronzed to the copper hue of an Indian, answered huskily:

"Why, no, ma'am. But, you see, we wasn't somehow expectin' to see——" He paused, swallowed hard.

"Brazo," interjected Hardin, whose mind, evidently, was at this minute more active than his friend's.

Ella's gaze went to him. It was so direct that, trying to meet it, Hardin failed and grinned vacuously.

"And so, not expecting to meet Brazo, you were afraid of me," said Ella. "I expect Brazo has told you how he happens to be here with me?" she asked, her voice more serious.

Both men nodded affirmatively.

"We're sorry things turned out like they did for you," said Hardin.

"We wouldn't wish for anything like that to happen to a woman," added Anderson.

"I am sure you wouldn't!" declared Ella. "And now," she went on, "do you think I would allow such sympathy to go unrewarded? I can't promise you much, but we will do the best we can. Won't you come in and have dinner with us? It will be nicer than eating out here."

"If you put it that way, ma'am," said Hardin.

They followed her to the cabin.

Brazo was filling the coffee pot with fresh water, for it had boiled once and had not been used.

Ella discovered that she had to make the conversation. Brazo was silent, and the guests were self-conscious and diffident, replying only when directly addressed and offering no comment. The two were, Ella felt, even more abashed in her presence than Brazo; and Brazo looked at her only when he was certain her gaze was not upon him.

And Brazo, she knew, was bold and aggressive. She had divined his confidence in himself when he had stood

just outside the door of the cabin awaiting the coming of the two men. Before he had recognized them, he had been prepared to defend her, and there had been no hesitancy in his manner. She had felt the imminence of tragedy and she had known that he was prepared for it. She wondered, glancing beneath her lashes at the youthful though rugged faces of the three, what experiences were concealed behind their grave and abashed eyes. Certainly none that lay very heavy upon their consciences. They were wholesome, clean, dependable. Brazo had told her they were square. She believed him. She knew Brazo was square, for he had already proved himself.

When they had finished, they would have immediately left the cabin, but her voice restrained them.

"I think I understood Brazo to say that you men were looking for a job?" she asked.

Both nodded.

"Do you think you would care to work for me?" she added.

She was looking at Anderson and Hardin, but she felt Brazo's gaze upon her. He had straightened a little. He was astonished.

"Why, ma'am, we'd be glad to," answered Anderson. "But—but——"

"But you don't see anything here to do," smiled Ella. She now glanced at Brazo and observed that he was frankly amazed.

"I know something about cows," she went on. "This is a good country for cows. I am going to stay here. I am going to build a nice, big ranch house, some corrals, and —and other things. And I am going to raise some nice

cattle—Herefords, I think. Do you think you could stay here and help me?"

"Ma'am," said Hardin, "you've hired us."

The men were elated. They went out, mounted their horses, and rode away, evidently to inspect the country in which they were to work. Brazo got up, went to the door, and watched them. He turned when, after a little while, he felt Ella standing close to him.

"You know why I have decided to stay here," she said.

"I've got an idea. It's because Jim lived here."

"Yes. Do you mind riding around with me a little? I should like to see some of the things Jim looked at."

Brazo regarded her gravely.

"Jim's writing puts the gold under the floor of the cabin," he said. "It was a mistake to put it there. That's one of the first places a man would think of, if he had an idea there was gold anywhere around. I've moved it. If you'll come with me, I'll show you where it is. After that, we'll go riding."

Ella followed him into the timber and to the edge of the river. On the bank he paused and gazed about. There was no one in sight except Anderson and Hardin, and they were riding slowly down the basin toward the cliff dwelling.

Brazo looked at the rocks of the crossing.

"Do you think you can make it?" he asked. "We have got to get to the other side."

She nodded, and he led the way, reaching a hand to her to help her over the widest jumps. She followed him without question to the other side; stopped and gazed

inquiringly at him when confronted by the sombre darkness of the subterranean passage; then tightened her lips and took the hand he offered her.

When they finally reached the outlet and the beautiful hidden valley was disclosed to her view, she caught her breath and stood rigid.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, at last.

Then she stood silent, her eyes glowing. She turned to Brazo, her lips parted, her face pale.

"Oh!" she exclaimed again, "it is glorious! Did Jim know of this?"

"Jim found the gold here," he told her. He led her over the crest of a small hill and down into a little gully close to the base of the gigantic wall that shut the valley from the outside world.

"Right here is where Jim did his digging," he said, pointing out the spot. "He didn't have to dig much. A pocket, but a big one. I've dug around a lot, but there doesn't seem to be any more. Jim came upon it by accident. Likely there's more around."

He led her back toward the entrance to the cavern, perhaps a hundred feet from the river, and showed her a crevice in the huge wall behind a thick clump of brush.

"Jim's gold is in there," he said. He parted the brush, reached into the crevice and drew out a small bag. He drew out several others and piled them on the ground at her feet.

"We'll take this over to Cooney and turn it over to the express company. There's no assayer at Cooney, but the express company will ship it on to Deming and give you credit for it. You'll have more credit than anyone

in the country, once this gets out. You'll have more. In a week, there'll be a rush to the basin. There'll be a stampede. Had you thought of that?"

"I have read of such things. But Jim owned this land and nobody had a right to trespass upon it!"

"They'll settle all around. They'll swarm all over the country. Likely they'll start a town."

"Let them. There is plenty of room. They can start their town at the farther end of the basin. But they shall not trespass upon my land!"

"I reckon they won't," conceded Brazo, observing the flash in her eyes.

"Well," he added, "if you're going to start to building, there's no time like the present. "We'll get this gold to Cooney." He picked up the bags and led the way back through the cavern to the river. Once in the timber, he stalked ahead of her toward the cabin. He placed the bags in a corner, went outside again, and stood for some time gazing speculatively at the wagon. When he became aware that Ella was standing near him, he spoke to her.

"It's likely you're thinking of going to Cooney too," he said.

"Yes."

"That's what I thought. Well, we might run into Wolf Wilson and his friends. But maybe not. Wilson won't get over that hole in his chest soon. But we've got to put that gold where it won't be found so easy." He scratched his head and then gravely stroked his chin. Ella watched him silently.

"Sure," he said after a time. "Cooney." He gazed quizzically at the girl.

"Do you know what a 'cooney' is?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Well," he said, "I'll make one. Jim's got a dry hide."

He went into a shed and brought out a dried cowhide which he suspended under the bed of the wagon, securing the hide by the corners. The result was a rather spacious, hammocklike pocket under the bed of the wagon.

"Some cook with an idea of saving his legs invented this," he told the girl. "There's times when wood suitable for fire building ain't to be had. The cook who first built a cooney picked up dry wood as he drove along in the chuck wagon on a drive. He put the dry wood in the cooney, where it stayed dry. But a cooney will carry gold, too, with dry wood piled around it."

They decided they would start at dawn the following day in an attempt to make the trip without a night camp in the open. So Brazo concealed the bags of gold in the wall of the cabin with the one he had previously placed there.

Anderson and Hardin returned late in the afternoon. Both reported good grazing in the vicinity. There was a great deal of timber in the section, but it was mostly fir and spruce, and if cattle got into it they could be driven out easily.

After supper, they all went to the edge of the timber. Hardin and Brazo had drawn apart from Anderson and Ella, for the girl had seemed interested in Anderson from the beginning. She now sat beside him on the fallen tree trunk talking with him, and apparently paying little attention to Hardin and Brazo.

Brazo could not hear what she was saying, nor could he hear Anderson's replies to her questions.

"You recognized Brazo quickly," she said. "How was that? I understand he has changed quite a little in appearance. He has grown a beard, for one thing."

"Shucks, ma'am," grinned Anderson. "I rode with Brazo for three years. I'd know him, first pop, if I couldn't see anything but his eyes an' his forehead."

"Yes," returned Ella musingly, "I suppose you would. He really has fine eyes, hasn't he? But isn't he bold, Mr. Anderson?"

"Bold?"

Anderson seemed puzzled. He glanced sharply at Ella.

"That's a word I never rightly understood, ma'am. I reckon you've got to put it some other way."

"Forward, then," she went on. "He depends upon himself. He goes right ahead and does things without asking anybody's opinion."

"Well, maybe you're right. Brazo don't ask many questions. Seems he knows what he's doin' all the time. Seems to think things out in advance."

"Why did he quit Mr. Hellman?"

"Said he'd got tired of seein' the same things all the time. Same as us. Wanted a change."

"Weren't there any towns near?" she asked. "I thought I heard him mention Tombstone."

"Sure. But Brazo wasn't interested. The other boys would hit town, an' Brazo would bang around the ranch house doing some fool thing that could have been put off."

Ella meditated. "Did Mr. Hellman have a family?" she asked.

"A wife an' two boys."

"And they kept house alone? Didn't Mrs. Hellman have any servants?"

"A Chink."

Then it wasn't a daughter or another girl that kept Brazo from going to "town" with the other men. But Ella hadn't finished.

"Do you think Brazo killed the paymaster?" she asked.

"Shucks, no!" scornfully declared Anderson. "Brazo says he didn't, an' that's enough for me—for anyone that knows him. I reckon Brazo wouldn't lie to save his skin!"

So Brazo had told the new men about the incident of the killing. She had wondered just how much Brazo had confided to his friends.

"But he killed Wolf Wilson," she said. "That is, he thought he had killed him."

"That was different," defended Anderson. "Wilson was chasin' you, wasn't he?"

"That's so," she agreed. "But I really don't know for certain that the man he shot was Wolf Wilson."

"Would that make any difference? It sure was one of the gang that took you to their shack."

She gravely contemplated the soft colours of the afterglow.

"And do you think it was one of Wilson's men who was listening outside the cabin after—after we went inside?"

"Sure! They'd heard about your brother buyin' stuff in Cooney with gold nuggets." And now Anderson asked a question. "You told Brazo that the man who

took you to the shack where his gang was had been called Wolf Wilson. Didn't you take a look at him after Brazo shot him?"

"No," answered Ella.

"Scared of him, eh?" he grinned. "Well, most women would have been. But Brazo said that, after he shot the man, you went straight to the cabin without waitin' or askin' any questions."

She was relieved to discover that Brazo was holding the final episode of her adventure sacred. Much depended upon what he had told his friends. If he had related what he had done while she had been unconscious in the addition, she would have known that he lacked the delicacy she had hoped was in him.

Brazo and Hardin had walked away. They reached the river and stopped. Evidently they were talking about the water; for if a ranch was to be established here, plenty of water was a necessity.

"Brazo cannot ride around the country very much," remarked Ella to Anderson. "He would be recognized and arrested. Someone would be sure to discover that he is masquerading as my brother."

"They sure would. Maybe not a stranger. But anybody who saw Brazo before he got that beard on would be sure to know him with it. That stableman at Bain's. Bain himself. Brazo told me he stayed at Bain's overnight. If he did, Bain would know him."

"The safest place for Brazo is right here," said Ella.

"Right here," agreed Anderson.

"He wants to go to Cooney to-morrow, and I think I shall not let him go!" declared Ella.

"He'd ought to keep himself away from towns,"

said Anderson. "Folks drift in. Maybe he'd run into Bain there."

"Would you and Mr. Hardin ride to Cooney with me and some of the gold?" questioned Ella.

"Sure!"

Ella did not apprise Brazo of her selection until just before dawn the following morning. Anderson and Hardin had slept in the timber, and had been waiting just outside the door of the cabin when Brazo opened it.

"You're up early," suggested Brazo.

"We're travellin' at daylight," answered Anderson. Hardin nodded when Brazo's gaze went to him.

Ella had opened the door of her room. She was ready to travel also, and had put on one of her brother's coats. She had none of her own, and there was a chill in the air which was felt in the cabin in spite of the fact that there was a fire in the stove.

"You leaving us?" asked Brazo.

"Goin' to Cooney," answered Anderson. "Me an' Clay."

"Have you been dreaming, Lafe?" asked Brazo.

Ella stepped forward, met Brazo's wondering glance.

"I thought it best to have Anderson and Hardin go with me, Brazo," she said. "I have been talking to Anderson about the new house, and he tells me he knows exactly how a house should be constructed. He is going to tell me what to buy. He is also going to buy some cattle for me. He knows several ranchers in the section; and he thinks he can get a few men to work here."

Brazo met Ella's eyes.

"Lafe's a good man," he said.

He turned to the stove, took up the coffee pot, and poured the amber liquid into the cups on the table. Later, he carried the bags of gold out and packed them into the cooney. He spoke occasionally to Hardin, less often to Anderson, and not at all to Ella. And when they left—Ella and Anderson riding horses, and Hardin seated on the wagon—he abruptly turned and went into the cabin, not even looking after them as they went southward.

But he thought he knew what had happened. He had not failed to observe how Ella and Anderson had sat together on the fallen tree the night before. He remembered that they had talked in subdued voices. They must have arranged the details of the Cooney trip then.

Anderson was a good man. Anderson had not lied if he had told Ella that he knew how a house should be built, for he had helped to build several. Likewise, Anderson knew cattle and quite a number of cattle owners. He also knew a great many men in the section, for he had worked all through it. In addition, Anderson was big, manly, and good-looking.

Quite a combination.

Brazo's smile was a trifle crooked with cynicism, but his chief emotion was that of resentment over the fact that he had not even been consulted about the details of the trip. They had left him entirely out of it.

CHAPTER XII

BRAZO'S resentment did not last. He kept seeing Ella as she had appeared to him when she had emerged from the cabin wearing one of her brother's old coats. The garment was far too large for her. It enfolded her like a blanket. It was too broad in the shoulders. The sleeves were too long, and she had turned them back so that the lining was exposed. But she had covered the rent in her waist.

To Brazo she had seemed more beautiful than ever. The contrast of the smooth, firm skin of her throat and face with the rough man's garment was startling. And yet Brazo saw something pathetic in it. She was trying to carry on a task that a man had started. She hadn't the stature or the strength of her brother, and yet she had the courage and the determination to emulate him. There had been a challenge in her eyes when she had emerged wearing the coat.

The garment had seemed to accentuate the appeal of her. Mutely it called attention to her feminine graces, the satiny smoothness of her skin, the softness of her flesh, the charm of her rounded throat and chin.

Brazo's resentment could not last because his deep sympathy for the girl overwhelmed it. She had spoken of a suitcase that she had brought with her, and in her recital of her adventures she had told him that the

outlaws had taken it from her. Undoubtedly, the suitcase contained articles of wearing apparel that were invaluable to her, that she could not replace in the store at Cooney, and which, if the suitcase were not recovered, she would have to do without. She had not mentioned the suitcase, she had made no reference to its loss after she had related what had happened to her. But her forlorn appearance had mutely advertised her need of its contents. And now Brazo remembered the challenge in her eyes as, wearing her brother's coat, she had stood in the cabin looking at them all. Brazo remembered that her gaze had rested upon him with a peculiar intentness.

She had been silently telling him that she needed the contents of the suitcase!

Brazo went into the hidden valley and caught Blinky. He led the horse to the door of the cabin, saddled and bridled him, slipped his rifle into the sheath, mounted and rode down the basin.

He did not know exactly where to look for Wolf Wilson's shack, but he remembered that Ella had told him that she had ridden east after escaping, and therefore Brazo rode west.

After he got out of the basin, he came to a level stretch of sand. The river had doubled sharply northward, into a gorge. He was certain that Ella had not followed it there, so he kept going straight westward. Two nights and a day had passed since the girl had had her experience with the outlaws and Brazo had no hope of finding any tracks that her horse had made in the race from the outlaw shack. But Brazo rode several times across the level, and presently he was leaning

over examining a set of hoof prints that seemed to come in a straight line from a southwesterly direction.

Brazo followed the tracks for a mile. They were not always visible, but where he could see them at all they were deep, and he knew from the way the prints were grouped that the animal which had made them had been running fast. He followed them to the edge of the level and then lost them on a rocky slope. But half a mile farther on he came upon them again. And now another set joined the first. Brazo decided that here Wilson had lost the girl in the darkness. He had probably not caught sight of her again until she reached the crest of the ridge above the basin, where she would be for an instant on the skyline.

The two sets of tracks vanished down a dry arroyo to a flat. Here the river doubled back again, and for a time Brazo rode along the banks, under some trees. The two sets of tracks were here deep and well defined. He lost them again in some hills. But beyond the hills he picked them up and followed them across another sand level.

Here they separated. One set came straight from the west; the other came angling into them from the southwest. This must have been about where Wilson had caught his first glimpse of the girl after she had escaped.

Brazo decided that, in his search for the girl, Wilson would have ridden south, toward Cooney, thinking that because she had no knowledge of the location of Henley's cabin she would have tried to reach town. So Brazo followed the tracks that came out of the west.

At a little distance from the point where the two sets

of tracks converged, Brazo lost the set he was following. He did not see them again. But he had no doubt that Ella had kept going in an easterly direction as straight as the character of the land would permit. Naturally, unless she had caught sight of the men who were searching for her, she would have chosen the open spaces and the levels. But he remembered that she had told him that she had ridden for some time in some timber, and in that case she had wandered much from a straight line. The chances were that Wilson's shack was not as far from the Henley cabin as Ella had thought; and toward noon Brazo yielded to a conviction that he was not far from it. The shack would be near water, he was certain, and shortly after noon, vindicating his conviction, he was sitting motionless on his horse on a wooded knoll, behind a great clump of wild brush, looking down upon a small cabin.

The cabin sat near the edge of the river in a flat that was not more than a quarter of a mile wide. It was, perhaps, a mile long, and its westerly end narrowed into a cañon that seemed to be cut through a plateau. The floor of the flat was covered with a wild growth of trees and brush. There was no defined trail through it.

Near the shack was a small corral in which were several horses. A saddle was hung on one of the corral posts, near a gate. There was no smoke coming from the chimney of the shack, and no human form was visible to Brazo. Apparently, the shack was deserted.

Brazo waited. For an hour, after dismounting, he stood in the brush peering down into the flat. He heard no sound, saw no movement. Convinced that none of Wilson's men were in the vicinity he at last tied Blinky

to a tree and descended the hill to the floor of the flat.

The shack was only a few hundred feet from the bottom of the slope, and when Brazo reached it after a cautious approach through some thick underbrush he heard no sounds from within. But he had drawn his gun as he neared the shack, and he moved stealthily around the nearest corner until he reached an open doorway.

Standing there, listening, he heard a groan.

Wilson, he decided. Wilson, badly hurt by the bullet he had received after striking Ella. They had got him here. Assuredly there would be one of the men with him, taking care of him.

Brazo stepped into the doorway. He was rigid, crouching, for he expected to kill the man who was with Wilson. To his amazement, Wilson was alone. He was lying flat on his back in a bunk, his feet toward the doorway. He was staring straight upward and apparently had not seen or heard Brazo.

However, as Brazo moved toward him a board in the floor creaked sharply.

Wilson raised his head. His face reddened; he glared at his visitor.

"You, eh?" he said.

"Yep." Brazo walked close to the bunk and gazed down at the outlaw.

Wilson cursed. Then he became silent.

"That's the way you feel, eh?" said Brazo. "Well, I don't blame a man for getting tired of working for forty a month. It's a slow way of getting rich. But if he has to go around hitting women, he ought to expect somebody'd try to pulverize him."

"So it was you!" said Wilson. "I wasn't sure. One of

the boys was listenin' an' heard you tell the Wainright girl your name. You didn't pulverize me—not near. Your bullet hit a rib an' glanced off. But it cut a hell of a hole in my side. It knocked me. I knowed if I'd show life you'd mebbe finish me. So I lay there an' let you take the girl away. Then I got up an' lit out."

"Shucks. I was aiming with good intentions, Wilson." Brazo smiled faintly. "Tombstone get too hot for you?" he inquired.

A hatred so intense that it drove the blood from Wilson's face now glared from the man's eyes.

"You always was a damned meddler!" he said, his voice thick and heavy with passion. "Down at Tombstone, an' now here! One way or another, I'm goin' to kill you for interferin'!"

"You've tried twice," said Brazo. "The next time I won't do any missing."

Brazo saw a six-shooter on the floor beside Wilson's bunk. He reached down, picked up the weapon, removed the cartridges, and tossed it upon a bench. He dropped the cartridges into a pocket. A rifle stood in a corner. He went to it and found it empty. He tossed it through the doorway.

Wilson watched him with cold, impotent fury.

Brazo saw a suitcase of the telescope type in a corner. He went to it, opened it, looked inside, closed it. It was Ella's and apparently nothing had been taken from it.

Brazo carried it to the door, then returned and stood near Wilson.

"I'm warning you, Wilson," he said.

"Want the gold for yourself, eh?" jeered the other. "Well—oh, go to hell!"

Wilson turned his head toward the wall.

Brazo picked up the suitcase and went out. He heard Wilson blaspheming, raging. Apparently there were none of the outlaws in the vicinity, or Wilson would have been calling to them.

Brazo carried the suitcase to the clump of brush where his horse was tied, fastened it to the cantle of the saddle, mounted and started over the back trail.

Until to-day he had never spoken a dozen words to Wilson. The enmity between them was a silent one, to be expressed in violent action whenever they met. It had come because of a mutual dislike upon the occasion of their first meeting, and had grown with each subsequent meeting until, with their first clash, Brazo had sent a bullet into Wilson's shoulder. Wilson had escaped a fatal wound because a fool in the guise of a peacemaker had struck Brazo's arm just as the latter's gun exploded.

The second meeting had been bloodless. It had occurred in a saloon in Tombstone when Wilson, drunk and ugly, had drawn a gun when Brazo's back was turned. An alert town marshal had disarmed Wilson before any damage had been done. They had not met again until now.

Brazo was elated. The task of recovering the suitcase had been an easy one. As he rode, he kept seeing mental pictures of Ella's astonishment and pleasure when he should show her her wardrobe, intact. She would know then that he had interpreted the look she had given him when she had appeared arrayed in her brother's coat.

And now he wondered if she had purposely left him behind! Had she expected he would interpret her glance?

Certainly there had been a challenge in the look she had given him!

He thought it entirely possible. Women were like that. Deep, subtle, shrewd, saying more with their eyes than with their lips.

Brazo was in no hurry to get back to the cabin. There was no telling how long Ella would stay at Cooney. She would buy certain things at the store there, and she would probably wait until Anderson bought some cattle from ranchers in the vicinity. Also, there was the building material to be thought of.

Brazo thought of the building material now, as he walked his horse slowly over a level that bordered the river. He drew other mental pictures in which Ella and Anderson were sitting close together glancing at each other and smiling. That picture was strangely annoying. He tried to banish it, but it persisted. It even grew more vivid. It changed, merging with others. They were standing, looking straight into each other's eyes and laughing. They turned, and both were facing him. It was strange that he had not realized that Anderson was handsome! He had never thought of Anderson in that way. Anderson had been his friend for some years, and it had never occurred to him to wonder how Anderson would look to a woman.

A woman would see things in a man that a man wouldn't see. She'd observe, for example, that his eyes were a deep, glowing blue—like Anderson's. She'd observe his mouth, which had good lines—like Anderson's. She'd detect a dimple that a man would never notice. She'd see a characteristic quirk of the lips that would interest her. Anderson had a queer way of

drawing one corner of his mouth inward. It was when his thoughts were wayward; when he meditated mischief. Now that he was on that subject, he reflected that Anderson had a bold way of looking at women. Somehow, without seeming to try, Anderson attracted women.

CHAPTER XIII

TWICE during the afternoon Brazo had watered Blinky at shallows in the river, and just before dusk, when he reached a swale about half a dozen miles from the cabin, he dismounted, threw the reins over Blinky's head to permit him to graze, and stretched himself out upon a clump of grass under a gnarled juniper.

Brazo's thoughts were still centred upon Anderson. He gloomily reviewed the year that he had passed in Jim Henley's cabin. He was aware at this minute that, although in the beginning he had stayed there to do what he could for Henley, the conviction that he would finally meet Henley's sister had kept him there after Henley's death. There was no use in trying to delude himself into the belief that he had stayed merely to turn the gold over to her, for he could have taken the gold, had it assayed, shipped, and held in trust for her until such a time as she appeared to claim it. He could have left word for her with Thomas, the storekeeper, at Cooney.

No, there was no use in his trying to fool himself. He had stayed there because he had fallen in love with Jim's sister—had fallen in love with her without seeing her, by idealizing her in his imagination. He had not been disappointed. That, however, was not what was bothering him. What was bothering him was the irritat-

ing conviction that, after having waited for her all these months, she had been instantly attracted to Lafe Anderson.

He had mistaken the challenge in her eyes. Instead of daring him to go after her suitcase, she was daring him to say anything to her about going away with Anderson. The chances were that she hadn't thought about the suitcase at all. She had just wanted to be with Anderson!

Brazo got up, stretched himself, grinned grimly.

Well, if he had to face that fact, he had to face it, that was all. No use trying to make her like him when she wanted to like Anderson.

But he had certainly dreamed a golden dream during all the months he had waited. That he was never to realize the dream made little difference. There had been other dreams that had not materialized. A great many of them. Life was like that.

Something struck him in the shoulder and knocked him flat upon his back. An excruciating pain and a sudden numbness. He caught a glimpse of a man on a horse not more than a hundred feet from him, westward. The man was levelling a rifle, and, as Brazo rolled over, the weapon crashed twice more.

The bullets missed Brazo. He lunged desperately and threw himself behind the juniper tree as the bark was splintered beside him.

Brazo had got his gun out. The rider had wheeled his horse, and the animal was making an infinitesimal pause while gathering his muscles for the initial leap away from the scene, when Brazo fired. A spot of dust erupted upon the rider's back low on his vest. He straightened, toppled backward out of the saddle. One foot caught

in a stirrup, and the horse galloped out of sight over a low hill, dragging the rider after him.

Brazo got to his feet, stood for a moment swaying back and forth, and then began to walk toward Blinky. Blinky had moved away a little distance during the shooting, but he was now grazing as though nothing had happened.

Brazo reeled and swayed as he walked toward the horse. There was no feeling in his left side; he had little control over his legs, for they seemed to waver in spite of his attempts to keep them rigid. They bent at the knees, and he could not place his feet where he wanted to place them. Also, his whole body seemed to be in the grip of a deadly nausea. When he reached Blinky, he stood for some time leaning against the animal.

Presently, the effects of the first shock wore away and he felt a new strength flowing through him. He looped Blinky's reins through his right arm and led the horse down a dry arroyo to the flat, broad bank of the river. Standing on the bank at a shallow, he opened his shirt and examined the wound. The bullet had entered his chest about two inches from the left armpit and had gone out through his shoulder, penetrating the major muscles.

Not dangerous, perhaps. An inch or two farther toward the centre, though, and he would not now be standing on the bank of the river.

He pulled the shirt down, knelt at the edge of the bank, and washed his neckerchief. Then he soaked the neckerchief in the sparkling water and bathed the wound. It had bled much, staining his shirt and vest.

He tore the neckerchief in half, soaked both portions in water, and applied one to his back and the other to the front of the wound. He could not keep the one on the back in place, so he stuffed some of it into the wound, where it presently stayed. He had little trouble with the front one.

He felt a great deal better after dressing the wound. He got his shirt on again and led Blinky back to the scene of the shooting. He found his assailant's rifle and stuck it under the straps of Ella's suitcase. It was not until he tried to get into the saddle that he discovered how weak he was. He could not swing up, so he led Blinky to a low rock escarpment, where he succeeded in mounting.

He sent the horse westward, into a growing darkness. As he rode, he managed to reload his six-shooter, by sticking the muzzle against the saddle horn and pressing his body against the butt.

He had no reason to speculate upon the identity of his assailant. One of Wilson's men, certainly. He had probably reached the shack soon after Brazo had departed and Wilson had sent him on the trail.

It had been a near thing. His own fault, too, for he had not exercised even ordinary caution. He should have anticipated what had happened.

He rode on into the darkness, Blinky still at a walk. There was little need for haste. He would be only a little better off in the cabin than in the saddle. To be sure, he would be able to rest once he got to the cabin, and he knew he was going to require a great deal of rest. For, while he was aware that the wound he had received was not dangerous, he discovered that he was swaying

back and forth in the saddle and that he was steadily growing weaker.

Lack of food, he decided. But he reflected that he had often gone without food for days at a time without suffering much inconvenience. Was his wound more severe than he had thought? If it was, he was in for a bad time. There was no one at the cabin, and possibly Anderson and Hardin would not return for three or four days. He could not ride to Cooney if the wound was bad. If it wasn't bad, he would not need to ride there. He decided the wound was bad, for it was bleeding again. He could feel a warm stream stealing down his back and his chest. His swaying grew more pronounced, so that, in order to keep from falling out of the saddle, he was compelled to steady himself by holding to the pommel.

A full, brilliant moon had come up by the time he reached the high ridge that fringed the basin. He almost fell out of the saddle when Blinky tilted to go down the slope, but he gained the level, smiling cynically over his weakness.

Blinky halted at the river and drank. Brazo must have drowsed, for presently Blinky was standing before the door of the cabin, obviously waiting for him to dismount.

Dismounting was not so easy. He seemed to have no strength left. But he finally got a foot out of the stirrup and swung the leg over. His left arm seemed dead and his right slipped from the pommel. He fell backward into the deep dust of the dooryard and lay flat on his back for a time looking up at the stars and the moon.

"I never knew you to do that before, Blinky," he said, aloud.

The dust was soft and cool. He wanted to lie in it, but decided he ought to go to bed right, in his bunk. So he got up and walked to the threshold of the doorway, where he sat for a long time leaning against one of the jambs.

When he felt a fierce white light shining against his eyelids, he opened his eyes and saw that day had come. He saw Blinky in the timber, so he got up and went to the horse, staggering, almost falling, and unstrapped the suitcase.

"She'll need it, you old coyote," he said to Blinky. "First thing you know, you'll be rolling on it and spoiling things."

He couldn't get the saddle off; he was too weak. So he left Blinky and started for the cabin with the suitcase.

Somewhere between the edge of the timber and the cabin he stopped. He could carry the suitcase no farther. He decided that presently, when he had regained some of his strength, he would complete the trip.

He sat down beside the suitcase and rested himself against it. Later, he opened his eyes and with some bewilderment observed that the moon was shining again.

There was a sharp pain in his shoulder, and his face was hot. But the sun was shining then. But later, when the moon rose, he was as uncomfortable as ever.

He was thirsty, and he tried to get to the river. His legs would not support him, so he went on his hands and knees over the deep sand and through the tall grass of the level until at last he leaned forward and plunged his face in the stream.

He took the two pieces of neckerchief, soaked them in

the water, and bathed the wound in his chest. He could not reach the place on his shoulder with the water, so he ceased trying.

"You've no business being around so far," he said. "But if you like Anderson there's nothing wrong in going away with him."

He knew he was talking "flighty," so he grimly set his lips and started back to where he had left the suitcase. "You can't get away from me now," he said. "I've got you too far to leave you."

But when he again saw the suitcase the sun was shining on it. He started toward it, but the sun would blot it out, and he would have trouble finding it again.

"You've been sleeping," he said accusingly. "The moon has come around again. But there's no use trying to find a suitcase that whirls around like that."

He found it, though, and laughed at it.

"Why, shucks," he said, "you ain't so little! And your hair! Why, it's just what I thought it ought to be! But that's twice, Wilson. I'm warning you!"

There was a period of blankness during which he answered somebody he felt was talking to him, although he did not know what he was saying.

"Talking to myself about nothing," he decided. "Well, there's nothing to talk about, is there, ma'am? I've brought you the suitcase."

"Oh! Oh, my God!" came a voice—Ella's voice. "Anderson! Hardin!" she cried.

But it wasn't Ella's voice. It couldn't be her voice. Ella was in Cooney—with Anderson.

CHAPTER XIV

AS BRAZO had predicted, there was a stampede to Battle's Basin.

Not many hours after Ella and Anderson and Hardin returned to the cabin, where they found Brazo lying inertly beside the suitcase, the first pilgrim who had scented gold appeared on the crest of the ridge above the basin. He was a desert rat, riding a burro and leading another, which bore his packs, and he rode straight down into the valley and up to the cabin door.

"What's yore diggin's?" he asked Hardin, who had seen him coming.

"The boss has got a clear title to a quarter section," Hardin answered. "We've run it with a transit an' chain, because we sort of expected they'd be someone nosin' around. Our line runs to the far edge of that timber down the river, an' two hundred feet south of that doublin' in the river. You can stake where you please as long as it ain't on our land. We go east to the hills."

"Thanks," said the prospector, "I ain't aimin' to jump nothin'."

He headed down the river and vanished among some hills near the cliff dwellings.

By noon the next day a dozen small tents dotted the level at the bottom of the slope on the southern side of the basin, and men bearing picks and shovels were

scratching the earth in the hills and the valleys. Clouds of alkali dust on the plains in all directions told where other seekers for gold were closing in upon the new El Dorado. They came singly, by twos and threes, in groups. They came upon burros, upon horses, upon mules, in buckboards and wagons, carts and buggies. They wore trails in places where there had been no trails; they crowded and jostled and cursed. They came from Cooney, from Silver City, from Deming, from Pinos Altos. They came from nowhere and from everywhere. Among them were cowboys, miners, ranchers, gamblers, slick city men, and they spread out over the face of the land like an army of ants, staking their claims and standing guard over them.

At the end of a week, the face of nature had changed. Where there had been the strange peace of desolation there was now frenzied activity. Where there had been a majestic silence there were now turmoil and brazen sound. Two rows of tents stretched down the basin opposite the cliff city, forming a street. Upon the street were men in derby hats, caps, fedoras, straws, and sombreros. Rough desert men with grim faces elbowed sleek-looking gamblers from the towns. Painted women had already made their appearance.

There were a bank, hotels, restaurants, a dozen saloons. A mayor and a town marshal had been elected. The new town was named "Wainright," after the man who had made the first "strike."

During the second week of its existence, Wainright began to change its appearance. Freighters began to arrive with their wagons loaded with building material. Shacks and sheds and store buildings began to rise upon

both sides of the street. The structures were raised overnight. They were garish in the strong sunlight, flimsy and unpainted. Many of them had no floors. But the sun shone and the climate was dry; therefore, none suffered inconvenience because of the weather.

Nickel organs were already in some of the saloons. How they reached Wainright, none knew, but they were there, shattering the atmosphere of the basin. The grass around the new town vanished, and the soil from which it had sprung was ground into dust by the boot heels of the milling crowds, so that, night and day, a dun-coloured cloud was suspended over the town. Gasoline and kerosene torches flared from tent poles and store fronts. The gold fever spread as far as the Capital, and the State Assembly swiftly passed a bill to legalize wide-open gambling, although such a law was not needed in Wainright.

Claim jumpers, confidence men, surveyors, state officials, gold-haunted stragglers, waiters, bartenders came to Wainright. Every day, from Cooney, came the stage, laden with new arrivals. Some gold came from the hills, and the stage took it back over the deep-cut trails.

Out over the trails had also gone Jim Henley's gold. Quietly, secretly, Anderson and Hardin had taken it to Cooney, where it had been exchanged for certain pieces of paper of amazing value.

But not once in the two weeks following her return from Cooney with Anderson and Hardin did Ella Wainright leave the basin. There were days when she would sit for hours upon end beside the bunk in the cabin, where Brazo lay unconscious, holding his good hand or stroking his forehead. At other times, interested

in another drama that was being enacted before her eyes, she would sit on the threshold of the doorway and watch the new town. It was far, but she could dimly see the people moving about on its one street; and at times, when the wind was right, she could hear the multitudinous noises peculiar to a crude and wild assembly.

A doctor had been brought from Deming to Cooney by telegraph, and from Cooney to the cabin by Blinky. At first the doctor had shaken his head negatively. But when, after three days of constant vigil and effort, insisted upon by Ella, the doctor had smiled.

"He'll pull through," he said.

There came a time when the doctor went back to Deming, saying he would not be needed again. Brazo had regained consciousness. His fever had left him. His head was now cool under Ella's hand. But he had not remained conscious long. He had merely opened his eyes, looked at Ella, and had gone to sleep again.

Brazo knew nothing of the building of the new town. He did not know that, during his period of unconsciousness, Harding and Anderson had received five hundred head of white-faced Hereford cattle, and that a wire fence had been erected in a straight line across the basin to keep the cattle from the new town. He did not know that dozens of men were at work upon the new house that Ella had promised to erect, or that a band of capable riders had been brought to the basin to care for the Herefords.

Brazo knew nothing of these things. For he was again with Henley. Over and over in his delirium he betrayed his secret emotions over the killing of the paymaster. Unwittingly he described his feelings while escaping

from the various posses that had been sent out after him. He lived again his life with Henley and revealed the thoughts that had been his while he had waited for the unknown girl to appear at the cabin.

And so gradually Brazo's character was unfolded to Ella. She had thought she had known something of him; she discovered a great deal more. She found that he was clean, for twice in his ravings he had suddenly lowered his voice to say:

"Nobody will ever know that. Maybe I did touch her once or twice, but I didn't mean to. Would you hold that against me?"

Plainly he was tortured by the fear that she resented what had happened in the addition on the night he had carried her there. Now she had done almost the same thing to him while he had been unconscious. She smiled.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Brazo finally awakened from the first natural sleep he had had in two weeks, he was alone. There was no one in the cabin. He tried to sit up, failed, and fell back again. He felt no pain. He knew what had happened; his memory was clear on that point. He had just about pulled through. He had known a doctor had been with him. He had felt Ella hovering near. Of certain things, his recollection was a bit hazy, but he knew that several times Anderson and Hardin had been standing near him, looking at him. He had heard them talking.

There had been a time when he had been uncomfortable, but that time seemed to have been quite a while ago. He was now cool, the bunk felt good to him, and he stretched luxuriously.

There was a mild breeze coming in one of the windows, and upon the breeze floated sounds which were strange to him. It seemed that not very far from him a dozen hammers were pounding. He heard a saw buzzing, boards clattering, men talking. Then he became aware that Ella was standing in the outside doorway, looking at him.

She smiled at him, and he was amazed at the light in her eyes.

"Oh!" she said, exclaiming softly, "you are awake!"

She came close to him, seated herself in a chair. She sighed.

"I'm so glad!" she added.

"Things must be going right," he said, closing his eyes.

"Oh, they are!"

"That's good." He opened his eyes again. "How long have I been here?" he questioned.

"Two weeks. You were in pretty bad shape when we got back and found you lying beside—beside the suitcase."

He closed his eyes again, not wanting her to see that he cared that she had been to Cooney with Anderson. For he knew she hadn't cared about the suitcase.

"Well," he said, still keeping his eyes closed. "Getting the suitcase wasn't important. There were lots of things in it that you probably got over at Cooney. What bothered me was that Wilson would think I didn't have nerve enough to go after it."

"There wasn't a thing in the suitcase that I could have bought at Cooney!" she declared. "I tried."

So he had been right, after all. She had tried to buy certain things in Cooney. That proved that she never expected to see the suitcase again.

"Well, I went over to see Wilson. I saw the suitcase there and thought I might as well bring it back."

"Did Wilson shoot you?"

"Shucks, no. Wilson was in bed, getting over my bullet. I was coming back, taking it easy, when a rider I hadn't seen plugged me. One of Wilson's men, likely. I shot him."

"When was that?"

"The day you went to Cooney."

"Then you were lying outside for three days!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how terrible!"

"There's been a doctor here," he said. "Who brought him?"

"Anderson."

Anderson, eh? Anderson. She had said that things were going right. That meant she was getting along all right with Anderson, he supposed. That was why her eyes were so glowingly soft and tender. Things were going along all right with herself and Anderson.

How quickly Anderson had captured her imagination!

"Anderson here now?" he asked.

"He is out helping the men build the ranch house," she answered. "Anderson is very clever. He knows all about building! You should see how he goes ahead! He knows just what should be done!"

"So you've started the house," he said.

Anderson again. Sure. Anderson was clever. Anderson knew how to "go ahead." He knew just what should be done.

Brazo turned his head to the wall.

"We bought five hundred Herefords," Ella informed him.

"Anderson buy them?" asked Brazo, glancing at her.

"Yes. He knows a man over there who has a big herd of them. They are here now. We have built a fence across the basin to keep them away from the town."

Brazo did not speak at once.

"So there's a town in the basin, eh?" he said finally. "Then you must have got the gold over all right."

"All of it!" declared the girl triumphantly.

There was a long period of silence. Then Ella spoke:

"Don't you want to know how much the gold assayed?"

"It would be interesting, I reckon."

"Over six hundred thousand dollars, Brazo!"

"Shucks! You're rich."

"You are rich, too, Brazo! Half of the money is in the bank at Deming in your name! Isn't that wonderful?"

He supposed he ought to show some sign of elation. He did smile wanly, but he was wishing that he could change places with Anderson.

"Aren't you glad?"

"Sure."

"Well, you don't show it!" she said reprovingly.

He smiled at her. "I'm not in shape to go to kicking up my heels," he said. His gaze grew meditative. "I'm thanking you for what you did for me. I reckon I was pretty close to cashing in."

"Terribly close. Once the doctor gave you up."

He was amazed to see her eyes fill, but, of course, that was the pity and sympathy that any woman would feel for any man who had been close to death.

But he couldn't endure looking at her, knowing that she had nothing but sympathy for him, so he again closed his eyes and turned his head. Thinking that the talk had wearied him, Ella quietly went out of the cabin.

Brazo heard her go and opened his eyes again.

He was rich, eh? Well, he didn't want her money. As soon as he was able to get around, he'd tell her so and continue his trip to Roswell. He would have told her while she had been talking with him, but he hadn't wanted to appear ungrateful. Later he would make her

understand that he wasn't entitled to the money; that he couldn't conscientiously touch it.

He believed he had no right to it. He hadn't done anything to deserve it, and he was not taking things that did not belong to him. Even from her. Not even if she insisted.

Twice that day Ella gave him beef broth. She wanted to feed it to him herself, with a spoon, but he rebelled and she yielded to him. He wasn't going to place himself under further obligation. He did not tell her that, but thought it.

Toward evening Anderson and Hardin came in. Both men were obviously delighted over his improved condition. Anderson especially.

Anderson's eyes shone; his grin was wide.

"You ol' horse thief!" he said. "You had us worryin'!"

He had to smile back at Anderson. In spite of what was happening, he liked Anderson. What amazed him was that a man who was taking another man's girl could seem so sincerely glad that his rival was recovering from a sickness that might have entirely removed him from active competition. The thought had no sooner occurred to him than he regretted it.

"Shucks, don't I know it!" he said. "I've been hearing all of you doing things for me. I'm feeling mighty guilty."

He felt like an outsider as he lay stretched out in his bunk watching Hardin and Anderson and Ella at supper. Darkness had come, and the lamp was lit and standing in the centre of the table, where it revealed all their faces clearly to him.

Ella seemed to be in high spirits. Her eyes glowed, there was a strange, soft colour in her cheeks. Anderson, too, appeared to be in the grip of a mild exhilaration. Hardin was rather quiet, pleased over something, though he was more successful than Anderson in repressing it.

They talked about the ranch, the cattle, the buildings, and while they talked Brazo watched them.

Anderson was handsome, for a fact. He had good features; he was healthy, virile, rugged. His cheeks were shining with health; his complexion had bloomed from its evening washing. His glistening black hair was short and wavy, carefully parted and combed. His eyes, especially whenever they met Ella's, seemed to develop new depths. When he talked to Ella, his voice was gentle. His drawl seemed caressing.

Brazo ran a hand through his own hair. It was dry and long. He felt of his beard, which had not been trimmed in many weeks. He couldn't blame Ella for liking Anderson. Anderson was a good man.

But he couldn't watch them any longer, so he turned on his side and went to sleep. Some time later, he felt Ella place a hand on his forehead, but although her touch awakened him, he did not turn his head.

The next morning, after breakfast, when they had all gone outside, he got up, closed the door and barred it, and dressed himself.

He was weak, but he opened the door and sought a bench which stood just outside the doorway. He sank down upon it in the sunshine and looked at the new town. He wanted to go around the corner of the cabin to look at the new ranch house, but felt he wasn't strong enough.

The new wire fence stretched across the basin. At the edge of the timber was a chuck wagon, and a man, evidently the cook, was working over a fire. A small building, obviously a bunk house, had been erected at the edge of the timber. That was for the new men.

Brazo could see half a dozen wagons coming down the long slope of the south ridge. They were headed for the new town and were undoubtedly loaded with supplies. Another wagon, laden with barrels, was hauling water from the river. Brazo observed the dun dust cloud that hovered over the town. The street was crowded with vehicles and people.

"She's booming!" was his thought.

He heard a gasp at the corner of the cabin nearest him, and turned to see Ella standing there looking at him. Her hands were clasped together over her breast. She was startled.

"Oh!" she said, "you shouldn't have done this!"

"I'm feeling pretty good," he answered.

"Are you sure?" Her concern was genuine, he decided.

He smiled. "I'll be off your hands soon," he said. "I reckon I've been a lot of bother."

"What we wanted was to get you well," she said.

She came and sat beside him, and he could feel her looking at him. But as it had been with him from the beginning, he could not meet her gaze. He dared not look straight at her for fear she would discover how he felt about Anderson. He didn't want her to know that. Anyway, his glances at her had always been surreptitious unless her profile was toward him. He had never been able to look straight at her when she was watching

him, for he always blushed and otherwise betrayed himself.

He had an uncomfortable conviction that, as she sat there beside him, she was smiling at him. He was sure of it when she again spoke, for there was a suggestion of quiet amusement in her voice, lightness, almost mockery.

"Didn't you want to get well?"

"Sure."

"Does your shoulder hurt?"

"No."

He wished she wouldn't be so concerned over him. What was sympathy if there was nothing stronger behind it? A doctor would ask him the same question.

"I have wanted to thank you for bringing my suitcase," she said. "It was very brave of you."

"Shucks," he answered, not looking at her, "that wasn't anything."

"Of course not," she said. "It isn't anything to go and have yourself shot over a suitcase. I suppose you just *had* to show Wilson that you aren't afraid of him and his men."

"I was just curious, I reckon. I wanted to see how bad I'd hurt him."

She gazed speculatively at the dust at her feet. She knew why he had gone after the suitcase, for he had revealed all his pent-up emotions to her in his delirium.

"She can't go around with that torn waist," he had said at one time; "it bothers her. And Jim's coat makes her look like there was no one to take care of her. But, my God! ain't she pretty!"

She nodded wisely, glanced at him out of the corners

of her eyes. She knew how he felt about Anderson. In his delirium he had withheld little.

Do women like to torture men? Apparently Ella did, for she smiled again as she spoke.

"Anderson is a great help here, isn't he?"

"Anderson is a good man." He would not praise him more.

"He and Hardin were trustworthy. I sent nearly all of the gold over to Cooney with them. You see, I had to stay here with you."

Brazo was silent.

"They have been wonderful!" she declared.

Brazo nodded.

"So I gave them each ten thousand dollars."

"That was right."

"Out of the gross, before I divided it."

"Sure. They had it coming to them."

"They were delighted."

"They ought to be."

"And they have promised to stay here as long as I want them."

Brazo turned his head away from her and did not answer.

"Did you hear?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, isn't that nice of them?"

"I reckon."

She was silent for a few minutes. Then she said:

"I have hired five cowboys to help Anderson and Hardin."

"Shucks!" was his first deprecatory word. "Seven cowboys to take care of five hundred cattle!"

"There will be more after a while, won't there?"

"I expect."

"Besides, Anderson and Hardin will be working on the house for some time. Anderson said, with so many people living in the town, we'd have to have that many men to be sure the cattle wouldn't be molested. The cook is extra, of course. And there are a dozen men working on the house."

He wanted to ask her why she thought it necessary to detail her actions. But he hadn't the courage, so he sat there silent.

He was conscious of physical inferiority. He had lost much flesh; he was thin, gaunt. He did not need to look into a glass at his reflection to know that his cheeks were sunken, his skin pallid, his eyes lustreless, his hair long, his beard scraggly.

How could he expect Ella to love him? He wasn't attractive to women; he had never been attractive, and until now he had not wanted to be. He had no personality, so far as he had been able to discover. Sure, there were men who liked him. He had friends. But there was nothing about him that attracted people, as he had seen other men attract. He was too backward, he supposed; he didn't like to push himself forward. He knew men who would dominate in any company. They usually were men who had confidence in themselves; they had mental qualities which somehow were felt by their fellows. They had certain physical charms; they knew how to engage interest, how to hold it.

He was too quiet. He could not talk well. He could not think of clever things to say to people. Usually, after a conversation, he could see where he might have said

something clever, only he hadn't thought of it while he had been talking.

Most all the talk he had ever heard he had considered unnecessary, anyway. What was there to talk about? The weather, cattle, grass, water, politics, social affairs, other men, women, horses, towns, self. Talk! The world was full of talk. Talk from the beginning. Talk to the end. The same old things. And the world going right along, ignoring it all.

He was sick of hearing people talk. He was particularly sick of hearing Ella talk about Anderson. Didn't he know Anderson? He knew Anderson better than anyone else knew him, and yet, in all the time he had known the man, he hadn't spoken a dozen words about him. He never talked at all about him unless asked.

Ella had been silent. He could feel her watching him. She spoke:

"Anderson said——"

Brazo got up and moved toward the door. Ella also rose and stood there watching him. But he did not look at her. He went inside, stretched himself on the bunk, turned his head to the wall, and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

BRAZO grew stronger. In a week he was able to walk about considerably. He roamed by himself in the timber, to various secluded spots up and down the river. He watched with some interest the prospectors who were working claims in the vicinity. But most of his time he spent sitting on the fallen tree at the timber edge, looking at the new town. Not once had he gone close enough to the new ranch house to speak to Anderson. He did not want to talk to Anderson, yet he reluctantly confessed to himself that he still liked the man.

Anderson did not come to the cabin very often. There was no need of Anderson coming to the cabin, for Ella went to him. She would prepare Brazo's breakfast, tidy up the cabin, and go to the new house. Brazo would see her there, talking with Anderson, standing close to him.

Anderson was consulting her about the plans, he supposed. Well; if Anderson knew so much about building a house, why didn't he go ahead and build it without consulting so much?

Of course, Brazo knew what Anderson was doing. Any fool could see that! Well, in another week or so Brazo would be able to travel, and then she could talk with Anderson as much as she pleased.

Ella didn't ignore him. She was still solicitous, still quite concerned about him. She warned him about

overexerting himself. Nights when they were alone in the cabin she would sit by the table, usually sewing, and talk to him. He would lie in his bunk, glumly watching her until she glanced at him.

Despite his resentment, he continued to be embarrassed under her glances. Only last night she had caught him watching her as she looked up suddenly from her sewing, and for an instant she had held his gaze.

"Brazo," she said, smiling calmly, "you are getting some colour back."

She need not have told him that. He knew he had blushed.

"Yes?" he answered.

"Aren't you glad?"

"Sure."

"Well, from the tone you use one would not think so. You are gaining weight, too."

Brazo was silent. So she had taken that much notice of him?

"Don't you think so?" she asked.

"I reckon."

"Don't you feel stronger?"

"I reckon."

"You almost died, Brazo."

"H'm."

She glanced at him again.

"Does that mean you didn't care?"

"Would it have helped any if I had?" he answered.

"Certainly. If one wishes for a thing earnestly, one usually gets that thing."

"I don't believe that," he said. "I've wanted a lot of things I didn't get."

"If you didn't get what you wanted you didn't wish hard enough," she declared. "I want to warn you, however, that there must be effort to go with the wish."

"H'm."

He didn't believe that, either. He wanted her, but Anderson was going to get her.

"Why do you say 'H'm' in that way, Brazo? Don't you believe that?"

"No."

"You have wished for things?"

"Sure."

"And you didn't get them?"

"No."

"Then you didn't try."

Maybe. Maybe he had never wanted anything as he wanted her. But he couldn't tell her that. So he was silent.

She was gazing meditatively at him.

"Do you believe there is a future life, Brazo?"

"Sure."

"What makes you believe it?"

"There must be future life because so many of us are unfinished here," he said.

"You mean that none of us is perfect?"

He fidgeted. She would be perfect in his eyes if she didn't pay so much attention to Anderson.

"I mean that most of us don't live long enough to correct all our faults. That applies even to those that think they have no faults."

"Cynic!" she mocked. But she gave him an intent glance.

She gave attention to her sewing, and Brazo watched

the beautiful curve at the nape of her neck. He sighed.

"Brazo," she said suddenly, not looking at him, "what were you thinking about during the three days you were out in front of the cabin, dying?"

"Nothing, I reckon. I can't remember."

"You must have been thinking of water, for we found tracks to show that you had crawled to the river twice."

"I remember. I was thirsty."

"Wouldn't it have been better for you to have stayed near the water? Why did you always crawl back to the suitcase?"

He reddened again, shook his head, and did not answer.

She smiled.

"Do you know what Anderson said when we found you sitting beside the suitcase?"

Brazo again shook his head.

"He said," she continued, "'once Brazo sets out after anything, he never gives up.'"

No thoughts came to Brazo.

"Anderson likes you, Brazo."

No answer.

"You know that, I suppose?"

No answer. Brazo stared at the ceiling.

"Do you like Anderson, Brazo?"

"I reckon."

"I like him, too," she said. "He is so clean and manly. And did you ever notice his complexion, Brazo? He shaves every morning."

Sure. Anderson was trying to make an impression, and he shaved every morning just to show off. He hadn't been in the habit of shaving every morning. Sometimes,

in the old days, months would elapse before Anderson would even think of a razor. Damn Anderson! Why hadn't he stayed with Hellman?

Brazo fell asleep while Ella sat there sewing. When he awakened in the morning, Ella had gone. He got up, prepared his breakfast, and gazed long at himself in the mirror on the wall.

He cleared up the table, tightened his belt, went out of the cabin, found Blinky in the corral, roped him, threw saddle and bridle on him, mounted, and rode to Wainright. He had been aware that, over near the new ranch house, Ella had been watching him. He hadn't looked directly at her, but out of the corners of his eyes he had seen that she was standing very rigid, as though restraining herself from interfering with him.

He rode down the new town's one street until he came to a barber shop that was established in a tent. He seated himself in a crude, makeshift barber chair, leaned back, and smiled grimly at the barber. He wasn't going to masquerade as Ella's brother any longer. He wasn't going to let his hair and beard grow until he looked like a wild man. If Sheriff Neil wanted him, let him come.

The barber regarded him with questioning gaze.

"Shear them all off!" ordered Brazo.

CHAPTER XVII

BRAZO emerged from the barber shop with his face cleanly shaved and his hair cut to its normal length. Except that he was a trifle more slender, he was the Brazo who had slept in a niche in a rock wall of the Gila and overheard the two riders talking about the paymaster the year before.

There was in Brazo's eyes a gleam that was reminiscent of those days in the past when he had gazed at the world with untroubled, unperturbed thoughts, when he had been unconcerned about the morrow, and when to-day's experiences would be accepted as trifles over which he had no control. For he had definitely decided that he would no longer attempt to conceal his identity. There wasn't any use in trying, anyway. Wolf Wilson had recognized him, and Wilson would get word to the sheriff.

As he emerged from the barber shop, he almost collided with a short, slender man. The two men smiled, uttered simultaneous apologies, and Brazo went on down the street toward one of the saloons without even bothering to look at the short man.

The short man, however, had looked quickly and keenly at Brazo. And he walked only a few feet from the spot where they had collided, halted, turned, and watched Brazo until he entered the door of the saloon.

Then the short man entered the barber shop and engaged the barber in conversation.

"Town's boomin'," he said.

"Sure is," agreed the barber.

"Folks is rushin' in," the short man said. "It ain't like most towns, where a man knows everybody. They come in here too fast to get acquainted with. An' a man would like to get acquainted with some of them. Take that guy who just went out of here. Stranger, I reckon?"

"Stranger to me."

"He didn't happen to mention his name?"

"Not any." The barber smiled. "Mostly they don't mention their names," he added.

"He say where he was from?"

"Didn't open his face except to tell me to cut off his hair an' his beard."

"He had a beard, eh? H'm. Changin' his style. Looks peaked. Been sick, I reckon."

"He did, sort of."

"Well, bein' sick changes a man a lot."

The short man went out. He walked down the street and went into the saloon Brazo had entered. The place was a tent house and there were several men in it, but Brazo was not there.

The short man went into the street again. He sauntered down the street, keeping his gaze alert as he entered one saloon after another. Finally, in a place of the better type, he came upon the man he sought.

The building was constructed of pine boards running perpendicularly. There were no battens over the joints, and the sun shone through. The place had a rough

board floor and no ceiling except the roof boards and rafters. A crude bar ran along one side, with a shelf behind it, upon which stood various bottles, a cash box, a mallet used for driving spigots into beer barrels, some whisky and beer glasses, and a huge Colt revolver. Hanging on the wall above the shelf was a small oblong mirror.

The top of the bar was built of two pine boards about a foot wide. These were damp from the beer which had been spilt upon them, and steaming from the suffocating heat. A nickel organ against the wall opposite the bar was blaring the strains of "The Mocking Bird." Men stood two deep at the bar, while two bartenders filled glasses with foaming beer as fast as they could handle them.

Brazo had drunk one glass of whisky. He had found it warm and not of good quality, and he wanted no more of it. But months had passed since he had visited town, and he found a certain enjoyment in being part of the crowd. It was his first glimpse of a boom town, and he was amused at the eagerness of the inhabitants.

The short man had entered and now stood beside the nickel organ. His head was cocked to one side as though the better to listen to the music which issued from the contrivance, but his gaze was upon Brazo.

Once Brazo turned and surprised the short man looking at him. Brazo's eyes narrowed. The short man's face seemed familiar. But the short man met Brazo's gaze fleetingly, giving no sign of recognition, and so Brazo decided that memory was playing him a trick. However, there was a speculative gleam in the short man's eyes, visible evidence of an emotion that had its counterpart

in Brazo's consciousness. He recognized the emotion as perplexity, and he knew that the man was trying to place him in his memory. Somewhere, sometime, Brazo had met the short man, had stood face to face with him. He was certain the short man was thinking the same thing.

It was strange, though, that with Brazo's perplexity was hostility. They were definitely blended, unmistakable. Brazo was positive that whatever knowledge he had of the other man was linked with antagonism. But memory was elusive. His contact with the man must have been a casual glance and the man himself negligible.

Brazo did not look at the man again. For a little while he stood at the bar, and then he went out into the street and inspected the town.

The open space between the two rows of tent houses had been cut into dust a foot deep by the wheels of wagons and other vehicles. It lay in huge windrows and furrows, in drifts and in mounds. It floated high in the air. It settled upon the roofs of the tent houses, coating them with a feathery gray. There was no wind to drive it away.

Established cow towns such as Brazo had seen had a very definite atmosphere of permanence. Their buildings, while not as substantial as they might be, were at least the best that could be had with the materials at hand. Also—and more important—the inhabitants of cow towns were usually honest and dependable. They were men one knew, they were identified with the country, they belonged in it.

The people of Wainright were transients. They were

not home seekers but gold seekers. They had no interest in the town beyond looking upon it as a place where they could secure certain supplies and satisfy their craving for food and drink. They had no civic spirit.

A dozen tent houses were obviously gambling dens. Crowds swarmed them, playing, losing to the sleek individuals, resembling spiders, that lay in wait for them. Restaurants before which myriad flies droned were filled to their capacity with humans competing with the winged pests. The fumes of stale beer mingled with the odours of cooking, and the stench of burning hoofs from a blacksmith shop was heavy over it all. Hawkers of various wares barked for attention; a three-card monte man was demonstrating his wizardry to a gaping, cynical, though interested circle. Another individual was challenging his hearers in dulcet tones:

"The hand is quicker than the eye, gents!"

Before him, on a small table, were three shells. A small sphere was under one of them, and he was inviting his audience to risk their money upon their selection. Seldom, if ever, did they select accurately.

There were several tents packed with supplies of various kinds. An assayer occupied one tent, but his small furnace worked only intermittently. A bank was near by. The banker's counter was a rough plank table, his vault a small steel safe. Stacks of gold and silver coin were on the table. A man holding a rifle across his knees sat on a box in a corner. A man who would rob this bank would find the entire town at his heels.

There were no children in the town; it was a city of adults eager as children. They were living in an atmos-

phere of unlimited license. Pickpockets moved with the crowds, plying their trade. Dogs barked everywhere. Painted women slyly beckoned. There had been killings. Already, on the slope of the southern ridge, were small wooden crosses.

Gold!

Brazo's interest was not acute. It was, in fact, cynical. He had seen enough, so he crossed to his horse, mounted, and rode eastward, toward the cabin.

Brazo had already forgotten the short man. But that sharp-eyed individual had not forgotten Brazo. He had stood well back in one of the saloons watching Brazo as the latter sauntered through town. And now, as Brazo rode away, the short man stepped out and followed his progress through the basin. He watched Brazo ride eastward until he reached the wire fence that had been erected; he watched Brazo follow the fence to the river, observed that he crossed the stream and rode along the edge of a timber clump toward a cabin that was just visible to him.

Then the short man quietly questioned several persons he met. He discovered that the cabin had belonged to one Jim Henley, who had made the first strike. Jim Henley lived in the cabin with his sister, who had come from "somewhere." Jim Henley had a beard. He was tall, slender, but muscular. He had lived in the basin about ten years. Nobody knew where Henley had made the strike. Nobody had found his diggings. Henley wasn't saying.

The short man was not satisfied with the information he had gathered, so he persisted in asking questions

about Henley. And late that night, in one of the saloons, he was talking to Wilson. It appeared that he and Wilson had met before.

"What do you know about Jim Henley?" asked the short man.

"Not much." Wilson seemed amused. "You seen him?" he returned.

"A man folks say is Henley," answered the short man. "He had his beard shaved off. He went over to the cabin when he left here."

"Tall man?"

The short man nodded.

"That's why folks think he is Henley," said Wilson. "Well, Brinn, they're wrong. Henley's dead. This here guy's name is Brazo. He's been makin' folks believe he's Henley. Slim Weller heard him talkin' to Henley's sister, whose name ain't Henley at all, but Wainright."

"Where's this man Brazo from?" queried the short man.

Wilson scowled. "From Tombstone."

"You an' him get along?"

"Hell!"

Wilson did not take Brinn into his confidence further. It appeared that, though he was friendly with Brinn, he did not trust him a great deal, and as soon as he could, he left Brinn and joined a group at a card table.

But Brinn appeared to be satisfied.

"Had a beard, eh?" was his thought as he stood near the bar watching. "But he had it shaved off. An' he's been usin' the name Henley. Well, now, that's interestin', ain't it? Some men is right precipitate. If he'd waited a little longer about shavin' off that beard, I'd

never have known him, I reckon. An' I'd have taken a look at this town an' passed right on. Now I reckon I'll hang around an' see what happens. Posin' as Henley? That means he was pretendin' to be the Wainright girl's brother. An' the Wainright girl got the gold. H'm. Now, what do you suppose Brazo's lingerin' for? An' gettin' his beard shaved off?"

Brinn laughed and rubbed his hands together.

CHAPTER XVIII

ELLA WAINRIGHT had ridden eastward with Anderson while Brazo had been visiting in town. Anderson had wanted her to look at a certain stretch of country which he had suggested might be used as a grazing ground for the cattle, to keep them away from Wainright. She had watched Brazo riding away and had been aware of a pulse of resentment for his action in not telling her of his proposed visit. Of course, Brazo was master of himself and could go where he pleased without consulting her, and yet, knowing of her solicitude for him, he might at least have waved a hand to her. He had made no sign to indicate that he had even seen her. And though he had not turned in her direction, she was convinced that he knew she had been watching him.

With a woman's quick perception, she had known instantly when Brazo's jealousy had been born. It had been when she had drawn Anderson aside to question him on the first day of his coming to the cabin.

The knowledge had elated her, for at first she had been apprehensive that the boldness Brazo had exhibited with their first meeting would develop into an attitude of proprietorship. And she would not have any man think that he owned her.

Brazo had transgressed. With a quiet assumption of authority, he had built the addition, furnished it,

expected her to live in it with him occupying a bunk in the same cabin. He had waited for her, had anticipated her coming. He had even appeared to assume that she would make no objection to his plans and arrangements.

There were qualities in Brazo that she admired, but his easy manner of going ahead without consulting her wishes was not one of them. Brazo, she divined, had a habit of imposing his will upon his fellow men by quietly—but none the less ruthlessly—going ahead and doing the things he wanted to do. She was afraid that if she didn't quickly oppose him he would calmly appear before her one day with the announcement that he intended to marry her right away.

Of course she knew that Brazo loved her. She had been aware of that from the instant she had opened her eyes to his on the night he had brought her to the cabin. She knew it by the way he blushed when she glanced at him, by his moods, by the way he watched her when he thought she wasn't looking at him. Yes; Brazo was bashful, but once he decided to do a thing, he would go right ahead and do it without regard to anyone's feelings or objections.

So, deliberately, in order to discipline him, she had led him to believe that she was interested in Anderson. She had slyly mocked him, and with some amusement had watched him, knowing that he was vulnerable and that presently he would realize that there were some things he could not take merely because he wanted them.

She was not quite certain of her feelings toward Brazo. She knew that she wanted to be near him, and that, in spite of his long hair and the beard that con-

cealed his chin and lips, he had a positive and magnetic personality. His appeal, she supposed, was in his eyes and in his voice, and in certain odd mannerisms. His eyes were gray with a glint of green in their depths, and despite his bashfulness, they held a confidence and imperturbability that she was sure men would read and respect. He was deliberate, as though he did nothing without first taking thought. Always, when spoken to, and turning his head to look at the speaker, there was the mere hint of an interrogative smile on his lips. To her the habit indicated receptiveness, for the smile faded quickly into grave interest. She had seen him angry—as when he had shot at the listener—but his anger had been tempered by a cold humour.

She already knew what Anderson and Hardin thought of him, for she had quietly questioned them. They respected him, liked him. Anderson had told her that Hellman's had not been the same after Brazo had left. The place had grown lonesome. She knew what Anderson meant. Brazo's going had been regretted.

When Ella returned to the cabin that night, Brazo was in his bunk. After she lit the lamp, she could see only the top of his head. She went swiftly into her own room, carrying the lamp with her. She looked into her glass and with some amazement observed that her colour was high. She was aware that her pulses had leaped when she had seen Brazo in his bunk. Had she been afraid that Brazo would not return from town?

A strange emotion again seized her when the next morning she opened the door of her room to see Brazo, minus the beard and the long hair, standing at the stove. She was glad that Brazo did not look directly at her

when he said "good-morning," to observe how a swift colour mounted to her cheeks. For at that instant she knew that she loved Brazo.

He was still pale from his illness, and handsome in spite of it. His chin and mouth were just as she had mentally seen them through his beard. Perhaps his lips were a trifle more stern than she had supposed, but there was a whimsical quirk in them, and just now his mood was waywardness. His hair, cut short in the back and over the temples, was wavy on top. After the first glance at him, apprehension gripped her.

"Brazo!" she cried. "What have you done?"

"Meaning my hair and beard, I reckon," he answered, his back to her. "They were with me so long I got tired of them."

"But they'll know you now, Brazo! The sheriff! Someone will tell him! They'll come and take you!"

"That's likely," he returned.

She sat down in a chair beside the table and stared at him.

"Oh, why did you do that, Brazo?" she said. "It is suicide! Don't you know that they will hang you?"

"I expect they would," he returned.

"Would?" she echoed. "What do you mean by that?"

"They would if I stayed here to let them," was his reply.

She caught her breath sharply. She did not speak until she was sure her voice would not betray her agitation. Then she said, calmly:

"Does that mean you are going away?"

"I reckon."

"When are you going?"

"Oh, I ain't in any hurry. In a couple of days, I reckon." He now turned and looked at her, and she observed that for the first time since she had known him he was looking steadily at her with no appearance of embarrassment.

"I wasn't intending to stay as long as I have stayed," he said. "I've been here a long time. I promised Jim that I'd see him through, and I reckon I've done so. You are all settled here now, and there don't seem to be anything here for me to do. You've got good men around you; the gold has been turned into cash, and you've got your herd started. You're building your ranch house. I reckon I've done what I told Jim I'd do. You'll find the bank book you gave me where you left it. Before I go, I'll sign it over to you."

"You can't ride far, Brazo," she said. "You aren't well yet."

He smiled. "I'm healthier than you think. Riding won't hurt me any."

It was a new Brazo who stood before her. He seemed to have dropped his old identity with the shaving of his beard and the cutting of his long hair. He had been bashful and diffident in her presence, while now he seemed confident and aggressive. A new vitality seemed to have entered into him. But perhaps the vitality had been there all along and she had not been aware of it. At any rate, there was nothing of the old Brazo in the man who now faced her, nothing but the personality she had felt, which was now magnified by the charm of his altered appearance. A new and wonderful Brazo!

It was she who was blushing now. She sat very still and gazed at the tablecloth in front of her.

"Do you think they will really come for you, Brazo? I mean the sheriff?"

"I reckon. Wilson knows me. That man I shot at heard me telling you about the killing of the paymaster."

"Perhaps Wilson won't tell," she suggested. She was desperately seeking a way to hold him. She didn't want him to go!

"He'll tell, all right."

"You might let your beard grow."

"Not any more." He smiled grimly. "Hereafter I shave every day." He looked straight at her. But she had forgotten Anderson, and she did not perceive the sarcasm of his words.

"Why?" she asked. "You looked very nice with the beard, Brazo."

He might now have told her that, wearing a beard, he had been conscious of the superior attractiveness of Anderson. That he did not mention Anderson's name indicated that he did not mean to embarrass her. He would not try to gain an advantage by speaking a derogatory word about the man he thought she liked.

"Shucks," he said, merely.

He placed the breakfast on the table and sat down himself, facing her. She ate little, for she had no desire for food. She was vainly trying to think of some way to keep him. She could not brazenly tell him why she wanted him to stay, for pride would not permit that. And she could think of nothing else that would influence him. Yet he must stay! She would not let him go away!

Brazo did not talk, for there seemed to be nothing to talk about. Talk was futile. What a man—or a woman—said had very little to do with his desires, for mostly

words were used to disguise one's thoughts. Take Ella. If he hadn't known better, he might have thought she wanted him to stay at the cabin, whereas, in seeking to persuade him to remain, she was merely being polite to him.

He had hoped that she might advance a good reason for keeping him. There were good reasons, only she had not mentioned them. She was aware of the fact that Wilson and his men were in the vicinity, but she had not said a word about them, about fearing them. And he knew she feared them, that she had reason to fear them. Sooner or later, Wilson would be after her again.

But she hadn't mentioned her fear of the man.

Brazo had expected her to mention Wilson, for that would have provided him with an excuse to stay. He was reluctant to leave. He had a secret hope that in time she might change her mind about Anderson. But since she had been careful to avoid making a direct appeal, he knew that she didn't want him.

She had kept the conversation in a safe channel, had kept him talking about himself and about the danger of his being apprehended by the sheriff. Would any man be influenced by that sort of thing? She had been rather shrewd, he thought, in thus confining their talk, for of course she must know that, after revealing himself as Brazo, he could no longer stay in the section unless she asked him directly or appealed to him for protection.

She hadn't done that, although he knew—as she knew—that she needed protection.

But she didn't want him; she relied upon Anderson. And Anderson was a good man. If there was any fighting to be done, Anderson could do it as well as he.

Well, he had discovered one thing. Having his beard shaved off hadn't altered her opinion of him. She didn't like him any better than before. Jealousy had inspired that impulse, and now that the deed was done, he could realize the glaring fatuity of it, the conceit, the puerility. She knew, of course, why he had done it. Right from the first she had been able to see clear through him. That was why he had never been able to look directly at her when he knew her gaze was upon him. He hadn't wanted her to see that he loved her and that he was jealous.

He was amazed at the change in himself. He had always been able to control his passions. Not more than once or twice in his life had he lost his temper. Invariably, in dealing with men, he had earned respect by the soundness of his views, by his unconcern in danger, by his simple directness in action, by a cold, hard sophistication which had come to him through experience. And now he couldn't even think clearly. Strange, wayward impulses swayed him. Black, vicious moods gripped him. He was vacillating, uncertain. He wanted to leave, but was held by reluctance. He hated Anderson and liked him. He wanted to be near Ella, and yet, when near her, he wasn't satisfied, for he suspected that she was thinking of Anderson.

He got up and cleared the table, while Ella sat there watching him. She seemed strangely calm. Her face was white, her lips were pressed tightly together, her gaze was level and thoughtful.

"Why did you shave your beard, Brazo?" she questioned suddenly.

"Got tired of looking at it," he answered, his back to

her. He remembered that she had asked that question before. He also remembered that he had not answered her the first time. She was persistent!

"You have a face that one would not forget in a hurry, Brazo," she added. "It is distinctive."

"Ye-es?" he said, drawling.

"Were there many men around when the paymaster was murdered?" she asked.

"Only two that counted," he replied; "Bain and the stableman."

"And of course they would remember you." She seemed to meditate, then added: "The sheriff didn't see you?"

"We're not acquainted."

"Then, unless you happened to meet Bain or the stableman, you would not be in much danger of being recognized. Did Bain or the stableman know your name?"

"No."

"Then you are not really running much risk as you are—without the beard."

"Maybe not. I'm not worrying a lot about it."

"Yet you seem to be in a great hurry to get away from here, Brazo." She paused, then added: "And you do not really know if Wilson's man overheard you the night I came here."

"Wilson told me his man had heard."

"Well," she said, "I don't think there is much danger of Wilson telling. I have an idea that Wilson and the sheriff do not get along very well together. Certainly not if Wilson is an outlaw—which he is, of course. Are you afraid Wilson will tell?"

Brazo wasn't afraid of anybody. But he couldn't tell her that without acting like a fool.

"No," he answered.

"Yet you insist upon leaving," she said.

She drummed with the tips of her fingers upon the edge of the table, as she had done once before when questioning him. She was gazing at the tablecloth, and he glanced at her, knowing he could escape her gaze if she did not look up too quickly. But she seemed to interpret his thought, for she caught his surreptitious glance and smiled with tantalizing slowness.

"Brazo," she said, holding his gaze, "I have an idea you have not given me the real reason for your anxiety to get away from here!"

Of course he hadn't! And he never would.

"I reckon I have," he told her. "I'm through here. I've done what I stayed to do. I've been here about a year, and I've got tired of it."

"There is plenty to do here," she said. "There will be more. I am going to have a big herd."

"I'd got tired of the cattle business." Again he was hoping she would directly ask him to stay. But she would not do that.

"You want to be free, I suppose. Is that it? You want to roam around?"

"I reckon."

"Have you no ambition, Brazo?"

His present ambition was to marry her. But there was no use mentioning that. He had no other, so he did not answer.

She sat silent.

There came a sound from outside, a sound new to

Brazo and Ella. The tramping of many feet, the slithering of sand, a concerted crunching and shuffling as of many men, walking. Brazo was standing before the cupboard when the sound broke the silence that had come between him and Ella. He faced the door, drew his gun, waited. His thought was that Wilson and his men had come to seek revenge for the killing of the man who had wounded him after he had taken Ella's suitcase from Wilson's shack. He would not make the mistake of exposing himself in the doorway.

The sounds grew nearer. He could hear voices, laughter. Wilson's men would not come laughing. He moved to the doorway and stood in it, his gun in hand.

A hundred men, he roughly estimated, were coming toward the cabin, straight toward the doorway in which he stood. The crowd was composed of citizens of the new town. There were gamblers, merchants, saloon keepers, prospectors. He recognized the three-card monte man; the banker. Several women, grinning widely, were in the forefront. He saw Wilson.

Ahead of the crowd, walking alone and evidently leading the others, was a tall, thin man arrayed in a black shirt, corduroy trousers, high-topped boots without spurs, and a narrow-brimmed sombrero. The man had a large mouth and prominent teeth, keen, shrewd eyes. He was a stranger to Brazo.

He observed Brazo's gun. He smiled but continued to approach the door, lifting a hand swiftly, the palm toward Brazo. The peace signal.

He halted within a dozen feet of Brazo and smiled again, while the people accompanying him swarmed

around the door, though they had ceased talking and were now quiet and attentive.

Brazo observed that Anderson and his men were coming around a corner of the cabin. They had evidently seen the crowd approaching. Anderson smiled at Brazo, but there was a grim interrogation in his gaze. He came no closer than to the corner of the cabin, where he stood with the other men near him, watching and waiting.

Ella was behind Brazo. She was peering over his shoulder, but she did not speak.

The leader of the crowd again smiled at Brazo. It seemed to Brazo that the man was trying to repress some emotion, was attempting a casualness which he did not feel.

"You may put away your gun," he said, speaking to Brazo. "These people are not here to attack you. They got wind of my coming and followed me. They won't go back, for they are interested. My name is Kuneen. I am a deputy of the Federal Land Commission for this district. At Deming, I was given to understand that I would find here a certain woman of the name of Wainright—Ella Wainright, a sister of James Wainright who was sometimes known as James Henley."

Brazo turned, looked at Ella, and stepped aside to permit her to be seen by Kuneen.

Ella looked at the deputy. She was outwardly calm, though her cheeks had paled and her eyes were alight with speculation.

"I am Ella Wainright," she said.

The deputy bowed.

"Miss Wainright," he said, "I regret that I have an unpleasant duty to perform. However, I have no alternative." He cleared his throat and glanced at some papers he had taken from a pocket.

"Some years ago," he resumed, "a man named Mason accepted from the government a grant for a quarter section of land described in these documents. The land so described is now occupied by you as the heir of James Wainright. When Mason preëmpted the land in question, he was required to perform certain acts before the grant could legally be made—that is, before he could get a title to the land. Those acts were not performed by Mason. Therefore Mason was never given a title. Thus, naturally, his sale of the land to James Wainright was illegal. This land now occupied by you therefore again becomes part of the public domain. I am posting a notice to that effect. We have no wish to inconvenience you, so you may stay here as long as you like. But this land, since it is now part of the public domain, becomes public property subject to new grants to the people." He glanced at Ella's pale cheeks and tightened lips and bowed again. "I am sorry, miss," he added, smiling. "But I have had to do my duty."

"Do you mean that all these people may now come upon my land and stake claims?" said Ella.

"Exactly," returned the deputy. "You have no more rights in this land than they. Of course, if you have any preference, you may stake a claim to it under the regular conditions as to area and registry. But you will have to work fast, miss," he advised, "for these people are eager."

The deputy finished with Ella and Brazo and Anderson and his men as his only listeners. For the crowd which had followed the deputy had scattered and was swarming up and down the river, shouting, yelling, screaming its eagerness to claim certain spots where its various members imagined gold might be found. Men and women were running into the low hills eastward. Some had gone westward through the timber. Others were racing toward the river banks, toward arroyos that were cut into the hills between the cabin and the river, and some had gone only to a rugged valley not more than three or four hundred yards east of the new ranch house.

The sounds of their going died away. Wilson had gone with the others, and there remained only Brazo and Ella and the cowboys, and Kuneen, who calmly went ahead with his task of tacking up the notice.

Presently Kuneen finished. He smiled at Ella, bowed, and walked into the timber. He had tethered a horse there. He mounted and rode away toward Wainright.

Brazo had said nothing. He looked at Ella, who returned his gaze steadily. There was a faint smile on her lips, but her eyes seemed to be filled with tiny flecks of passion, of controlled indignation.

"Well," she said, "what do you think?"

"I think it's hell, ma'am!" declared Anderson.

"And you?" said Ella, still looking at Brazo.

"Kuneen is a crook," said Brazo. "This deal is a frame-up. It is a raid to get possession of this land. They haven't been able to find out where Jim made his strike. They expect you to rush right out and stake Jim's old claim. If you'd happen to do that, they'd jump it."

Ella nodded.

"I thought of that while Kuneen was talking," she said. She smiled. "Do you know," she added, "I had been thinking of telling those people where Jim's strike was made. I felt selfish. I felt I had enough, and that we should give the others a chance."

"Shucks," said Brazo, "they wouldn't have appreciated it. The more they got the more they would want."

They stood, Brazo and Ella and the cowboys, watching the eager gold seekers scurrying over the face of the land. Anderson and his men at last went back to their work on the ranch house, leaving Ella and Brazo standing in the doorway.

"Well," said Ella steadily, smiling bravely into Brazo's eyes, "that is the way things go, isn't it? It's like a game. The ranch is gone. Soon you will go, too."

She turned from him and gazed out of the door into the brilliant sunshine.

But Brazo's excuse for not going had come, and he smiled grimly at her profile.

"I'll be hanging around for a while yet," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

BEFORE darkness fell that night, the new town of Wainright had been removed from its old location near the southern ridge of the basin to its new site near the river.

There had been no attempt at order or system. No one had taken time to plan a street. The place bore no resemblance whatever to a town. It was a huge camp in which men erected their tents in spots which seemed most advantageous to them. A dozen tent houses went up within a stone's throw of the ranch buildings. A frame building—the saloon in which Brazo had observed the short man watching him—was already in process of re-erection on the bank of the river near where Brazo and Ella had crossed when Brazo had led the girl to the secret entrance to the hidden valley. Tents went up in the hills eastward, on the level southward, in the timber west of the cabin, and along the bank of the river northward. Wagons, carts, horses, building material, supplies were everywhere. Empty beer kegs, and many that were not empty, steamed in the sun.

When darkness came, the cabin was surrounded by a ring of gasoline and kerosene torches affixed to the fronts of tents, tent house, and the few frame buildings that had already been erected, and the yellow dancing

glare of the lights against the blackness of space made the scene weird and fantastic.

Ella, Brazo, Anderson, Hardin, and the cowboys held themselves aloof from their new neighbours. Anderson, Hardin, and the cowboys were lounging outside the bunk house they had erected at the edge of the timber, watching and listening. Occasionally, their laughter reached the ears of Brazo and Ella, who were seated on a bench outside the cabin, likewise watching and listening.

Ella had a staggering conviction that she was dreaming. It seemed impossible to her that a spot which had been so peaceful yesterday could to-day have been transformed into such a bedlam. In the light from the various torches, she could see men working, arranging their new dwelling places. Others, their work completed, were sitting in front of their tents, smoking, drinking, and talking with their nearest neighbours. Many were yelling at each other; some were shouting ribald oaths. There was vast confusion, chaos. Men crossed in front of the lights carrying boards, tent poles, tents. A man arrayed in a red undershirt and overalls, with no shoes on his feet, was rolling a beer keg across an open space toward the river. A team emerged from the outer darkness with a man on the seat of the wagon cracking a long whip over the heads of the horses. The wagon was loaded with supplies for the camp. The driver halted his team within a hundred feet of the cabin and yelled for someone to direct him to "Quinn's dump." Half a dozen men derisively jeered him; one of them telling him that he couldn't "direct nobody nowhere."

At a little distance from where Brazo and Ella watched a group of men near a flaring torch in front of a large tent there came sounds of dissension. The group became suddenly violently agitated. Several of the men ran from the spot. Another dove headlong to the ground and rolled behind the wall of a near-by tent. They left two men standing, facing each other.

"A killing!" said Brazo shortly.

For an instant the men stood rigid, motionless. Then one of them began to back away from the other, his legs spreading apart, his right elbow lifting. So quickly that the eye could not follow, their guns came out. Short, stabbing lances of fire belched, seemed to cross between the two men. One man sagged to his knees; the other was still erect. The man who had gone to his knees had dropped his gun. He leaned forward to grasp it, and, as he moved, another lance of fire darted from the hip of the erect man. The man on his knees shuddered, toppled forward, and fell on his face in the dust. He was motionless. The other man stepped close and stood for an instant looking down at his victim. He cursed, but his words were not be distinguished in the roar of sound that now came.

The killed darted into one of the tents near by. He must have instantly gone out of the rear into the darkness surrounding the camp, for when men came running from all directions toward the spot where the dead man lay, the tent into which the killer had gone was empty. Two men who had entered emerged cursing.

"There ain't nobody here!" said one. "He's sloped!"

The crowd pressed around the dead man. He was recognized by someone and his name spoken. A tall,

hawk-faced man wearing two guns shoved his way through the crowd and looked at the killer's victim. Brazo and Ella heard his voice, asking a question:

"Anybody see the shootin'?"

If anybody had witnessed the shooting none apparently cared to testify, for there was no answer.

The hawk-faced man bent over, turned the dead man face upward and peered intently at him. He picked up the fallen gun and twirled the cylinders.

"He let his gun off four times," said the man. "Looks like he had his chance. Some of you fellows cart him off."

"The town marshal," Brazo informed Ella. "He's given his verdict, and there'll be no inquiry. Simple, eh?"

Simple, rapid, ruthless. Like all the activity associated with the new town. The new Wainright had been built in a day, and very likely, when the gold frenzy vanished, it would die as quickly.

In five minutes the body had been carried away and the incident had apparently been forgotten. The uproar was renewed. The nickel organ had been set up in front of a tent amid some trees near the river, and its maudlin music mingled with the hum of voices. Two women, their trade expressed by their attire and their hardened faces, walked past the cabin close to where Brazo and Ella were sitting. They paused, glanced at the man and the girl sitting there, and tittered.

"Cute, ain't they?" said one.

The other's answer was unintelligible, but both tittered again and walked on.

Ella was sitting very still and rigid, her chin in the air.

There was a long silence, broken by Brazo, who obviously was voicing the final fragment of a thought:

"Well, if they don't find the hidden valley, this camp won't last long. It will go the way Babylon went, and that cliff dwelling down the river. Most folks are trying so hard to get something out of life that they forget what life is for. But the folks that lived in that cliff city didn't live fast, I reckon. Anyway, they didn't have any nickel organs busting their eardrums, and no wild-eyed galoots rushing around looking for gold to buy gew gaws with."

"Do you know anything of the history of the cliff-dwelling tribes?" asked Ella.

"I know what I have heard," answered Brazo. "A Spaniard named Cabeza de Vaca came up here from Mexico around 1537. The cliff dwellers were here then. They'd been here for thousands of years, apparently. Anyway, they were here when Vaca came. In 1598 the Franciscan friars came, along with an army of folks with another Spaniard named Onate at their head. These people swarmed all over New Mexico founding churches and missions. They tried to civilize the Indians, but they made slaves of them at the same time, and in 1680 the Indians rebelled. They killed all the Spaniards or drove them out of the country. Only a few of the Spaniards ever came back, but the missions and some of the churches are still here. The valley of the Rio Grande is full of them. The Indians are still living in the cliff dwellings, just as they lived before the Spaniards came. They don't change. They still have the same ceremonials and the same racial habits. Most of the cliff dwellers are from the Zuni tribe. They were smart.

They built their houses in the cliffs to be safe from the wild animals and the plains Indians—mostly the Apaches. Other cliff dwellers around in this country were the Picoris, the Teguas, the Cuares, and the Jemez tribes. Their cities are built like hornet nests. There are hundreds of rooms, passageways, and stairs. Ladders reached from one terrace to another. The tribes were pottery makers, and they cultivated some land. They hunted when the plains Indians were not around.

"Can you imagine what this country must have looked like when there was nobody in it but the Indians? Take this basin, for example. There was one tribe here. This river was here just the same as it is now. They'd look out of their windows in the morning and see the silent basin. Maybe there'd be deer watering at the river; maybe there'd be moose or elk. Maybe bear. Wolves. What else? We don't know. Maybe those people built up in the air that way to keep out of the way of the monsters that used to roam this country in prehistoric days. Maybe they got up there to escape the sabre-tooth tiger. Maybe they made their windows small so that great beasts with wings couldn't get in after them. Who knows?

"Anyway, they had this country to themselves. They must have enjoyed it. Maybe they lived here when this country was a forest or a jungle. Maybe they were here when the first volcanoes began to roar. Those people had brains enough to get out of danger. They had more brains than the plains tribes because they built where their camps wouldn't be wiped out by roving bands of buffalo that swarmed in millions.

"But I was asking you if you could imagine what this place looked like thousands of years ago. Imagine those people waking up in the morning and finding dozens of earth monsters trying to climb up to them, to devour them? Can you see them with their heads sticking out of their windows, staring down? Can you imagine a drove of sabre-tooth tigers trying to scale the walls? Or a pack of great wolves camping down here for maybe days at a stretch, waiting?"

He ceased talking and sat there gazing out into the darkness beyond the lights of the new town. Ella stole a glance at him. She wondered if he knew that his imaginary picture had been so vivid that it had stirred her? She wondered if he knew that he had made a comparison between the cliff city and this one which had been founded this very day? If he had intended to make the comparison, he had done it subtly, and he had given that old city a dignity that was not to be found in the new one.

The silent basin!

What a world of romance must have been in it in the old days! No nickel organs. No "galoots" aroused to a frenzy by a yearning for gold with which they might buy—what? No clamour, no turmoil, no scheming for wealth. She thought of how he had refused gold offered him by her brother; how he had even refused to accept it from her. Gold did not interest him, or the things gold would buy. Her eyes glowed as she watched him.

"I suppose you would like to have lived in those old days?" she said.

He laughed deeply, vibrantly.

"Well, I don't know. I like to think of what might have happened then. There would be men like Wilson, I reckon, who would always be wanting to take something from somebody else. It wouldn't be gold, of course. But Wilson would be wanting the biggest room in the dwelling, the best pottery, the prettiest woman for a wife, or maybe a wife that belonged to some other man. He'd want more than his share, more than he would be entitled to, that's certain. It's likely that if he wasn't a chief he'd be planning to kill the man who was chief and take his place."

"That's human nature, isn't it?"

"Well, yes, I reckon. The point is that a man ought to deserve such things before he gets them. You see, if a man is worth while such things will come to him. People will like him and do things for him. He'll have a personality that will attract folks."

"How does one know when one has personality?" she asked.

He laughed.

"It's curious," he answered. "But I've always noticed that a man with the strongest and most magnetic personality don't seem to know he's got it. You see, if he knew it he'd act conceited, and then he wouldn't have it at all."

It was quite obvious to her that Brazo was not aware of his own attractive personality. He did not wear the air of a conqueror, as did some men who had a strong personal appeal; he was not a commanding figure, and he did not push himself into the forefront. He was quiet, unobtrusive, and deliberate. He would, perhaps, never be a chief, but he would be the dependable and

trustworthy friend who would never falter in his duty.

His appeal to her had been insidious. At first she had been a little afraid of him because of his way of going ahead and doing things without first consulting her. But later, when she had seen that there had been no thought of personal gratification in his mind and that everything he had done had been arranged for her comfort and convenience, and that he had never questioned her interpretation of his actions, she had begun to realize how completely he had subordinated self.

He had no high opinion of himself, and so she had gradually grown to respect him. Somehow, she had always trusted him.

"Are you going to take Kuneen's word that your title to this land is no good?" he suddenly asked.

"What is there to do?" she questioned. She had not thought of doubting Kuneen. "Do you think Kuneen lied?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"He looks like a liar," he answered shortly.

"Suppose he is," she said. "Those people are here, all around us. They have staked claims. We can't fight them."

"That's true. We're outnumbered. They've got the law with them. They'd wipe us out if we tried to fight them. But there's something wrong. I'm riding to Deming to look at the records."

"Is it worth while?" she said. "If they don't find gold in reasonable quantities, this new town won't last long."

"That ain't the question," he said. "What's wrong is

wrong. If these people have a right here, that's all right. If they haven't any right here, they've got to get off."

"Oh," she said, "you are annoyed because you feel that you are being cheated!"

"Do you like to be cheated?" he asked.

"I think nobody does."

He stared at the various lights.

"I'll be gone several days," he said. "There's liable to be trouble here. There's men in this camp with gall enough to do anything. If I was you, I'd have Anderson stay in the cabin nights. And I'd have him near me during the day."

"Why Anderson?" she asked, glancing quickly at him.

"Anderson's a good man."

He had hesitated long in suggesting this. He did not want Anderson to be near her. Right now, black jealousy had seized him. But he wanted Ella to be safe, and he knew Anderson was a better man in a fight than Hardin. So, against his jealousy, he had arrayed his judgment. She did not see the dark flush in his cheeks.

"Very well," she said.

He got up, raging inwardly, realizing that he had hoped she would not accept Anderson. But rather than permit her to discover his agitation he told her gruffly that he was going to walk around the camp, and left her sitting there alone.

When he returned, she had gone to her room. He sat alone on the bench in front of the cabin until long after midnight, glowering at the camp.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Ella came out of her room the next morning shortly after sunrise, she found a note from Brazo on the kitchen table informing her that he had gone to Deming. She prepared her breakfast and then went outside to find that Anderson and the other men were already working on the ranch house. In another two weeks, Anderson told her, the building would be finished and ready to live in.

"But livin' here ain't goin' to be what you expected," he said. "You'll have too much company."

When she told him that Brazo had gone to Deming to make a search of the records, he shook his head.

"If it's a frame-up, they'll have it all their own way," he said. "A guy like Kuneen knows how to do things like that." He told her, though, that if Brazo had decided to take action, she might expect he would go through with it. "Brazo's slow, but he keeps on goin'," he said. He scratched his head. "Brazo's changed," he added. "Somethin's happened to him. Me an' him used to be mighty close. He'd tell me things that he didn't tell anybody else. Lately he don't even talk to me. There's times when he don't even see me, I reckon. Do you know what's on his mind?"

Ella knew, but she did not tell Anderson. However, she turned away so that Anderson might not see the flush that stained her cheeks. And she knew that she

would never have Anderson in the cabin with her no matter what dangers were to be apprehended from the citizens of the new town.

In the morning light, the camp presented a garish spectacle. It was formless and chaotic. Debris, supplies, lumber, piles of canvas, tent poles were strewn everywhere. Hundreds of wagons were about, being pulled here and there by wild-eyed horses that seemed to be as agitated as their cursing drivers. Other wagons were coming through the basin. The stage from Deming had arrived at the old town site, and finding the town had moved, followed it across the level, taking the trail already made by the freighters. Passengers from the stage got out and began to search for accommodations.

The din was terrific. A score of frame buildings were being erected simultaneously, the hammers of the builders beating incessantly. Lumber clattered, men shouted, women laughed hilariously, horses neighed and heaved, their mighty muscles straining; the wagons rattled; metal dishes clanged as individual cooks prepared breakfast.

However, no one interfered with the ranch buildings or came near them. It seemed they must have been warned, for they kept at a discreet distance, although many times during the first day Ella observed groups of men standing at various places seemingly discussing her. She knew they were talking about her, for the groups usually formed immediately upon her appearance outside the cabin.

She felt they were waiting for her and her friends to stake a claim and thus betray where her brother had made the strike. She enjoyed their impatience just as

she would enjoy their disappointment should they not find gold in paying quantities. Any sympathy that she might have had for them had been destroyed by their greediness.

She went back and forth from the new ranch house to the cabin a great many times during the week following Brazo's departure, and each time she was outside she covertly watched the people of the new town.

It appeared to her that the edge was wearing off the eagerness of the people. They were not so active; the groups in front of the tents and the saloons grew larger, as if discussing some questions of great importance. She got an impression that the saloons were not so busy, and she was certain that not so many new supplies were coming in. Once she overheard a man telling another man that Wainright would prove to be a "bloomer." That meant it would be a failure, that gold in quantities would not be found.

People grew less noisy and more thoughtful. The gamblers were finding fewer men who wished to risk money. Ella saw miners digging in the hills and panning the river, but not once was there any excitement to indicate that anyone had found anything worth while.

Twice during the week Kuneen appeared at the new ranch house and watched the men at work there. Each time Kuneen came, Ella tried to avoid him, but each time he succeeded in speaking to her.

"Going right ahead, eh?" he said, smiling at her. "Looks like you intend to stay. Well, if this camp plays out, you won't have any trouble relocating. Do you think you've got to the end of the vein your brother found?"

"I am sure I couldn't tell you, Mr. Kuneen," answered Ella.

"Which means you won't, of course. Well, I've no interest in the thing one way or another. Looks like these people are going to lose. If they don't make a strike pretty soon, they'll be pulling out. If they do that, you could buy their claims pretty cheap."

Ella laughed.

"I think I see what you are driving at, Mr. Kuneen," she said. "But I don't want their claims."

Kuneen smiled.

"So you're wise, eh? Or you are lying. Well, I don't blame you." He was silent for a moment, then he added: "I thought if I could induce you to reveal the location of your brother's claim, trouble might be avoided."

"Trouble! Why, what do you mean?"

"These people are getting restless. They think you are hogging things. Pretty soon, if you don't let them know where your claim is, they'll begin to get nasty."

"You know as well as I do that my brother never recorded a claim, Mr. Kuneen. If those people want to make trouble, let them. My brother never left anything to show where he got the gold he left here for me."

Kuneen thought he knew frankness when he saw it, and he appeared to be disappointed.

"That's the reason you haven't staked a claim, eh?" he said. "You don't know where Jim's claim was. He died suddenly, didn't he?"

"No, his was a lingering sickness."

Kuneen rubbed his chin.

"You would have thought he would have said something," he mused. "It don't seem reasonable

that he knew he was going to die and wouldn't leave you word about the gold. Didn't he leave anything? A letter or something?"

"If he did, that would be my business, Mr. Kuneen!" she said coldly.

Kuneen smiled.

"Then he did leave something, after all," he said.

"You may believe what you please!" she said.

She walked away from him, shivering with disgust. Somehow, Kuneen made her feel unclean. She went into the cabin and washed her hands and face.

She knew, now, that Kuneen was crooked. Brazo had correctly appraised him. All the time Kuneen had been talking with her he had furtively watched her. She had felt his gaze searching her. He had hinted that she might be lying, and his eyes had clearly revealed that he thought she was lying. He had not believed a word she had told him, and the only reason he had not ordered her off the place was because he had expected her to do something to reveal the spot where Jim had found the gold.

The next morning, when she went out to the new ranch house, she found she had another visitor. Wolf Wilson stood near the building, watching the workmen. She had been too close to him to retreat when she discovered him.

"Well," he said, grinning at her, "no hard feelings?"

"I should think you would be afraid to come here, Wilson!" she said.

"Afraid?" he laughed. "I reckon you mean Brazo? I expect you ain't tryin' to still pretend that he's your brother?"

"I never pretended that!"

"He was stayin' in the shack with you, wasn't he?" he grinned. "Well, then, if he wasn't pretendin' to be your brother——"

The stinging slap he received on his cheek staggered him. He cursed and leaped toward her, his face poisonously bloated.

"Wilson!"

The word, low, ringing, came from behind Wilson.

Ella had not been aware that Anderson was near, and now she saw him standing at the edge of a pile of lumber within half a dozen feet of Wilson, his heavy gun in hand, its muzzle pointed at Wilson's waist.

Anderson's face was pale, but there appeared to be no excitement in his manner. The passion that glowed in his eyes was a cold, deadly hatred. They were blue, but now they had little flecks of yellow light in them, and the lights seemed to have coalesced until they were like pools of cold fire.

Ella gasped with this revelation of the man's fury. Anderson had always been very gentle. He was aroused now, but not with the trembling rage that would have gripped many men, but with a repressed fury that made him doubly dangerous.

Wilson turned slowly to face Anderson. His hands started to go up, though they moved jerkily as though directed by wavering impulses of resistance. The dark blood had left his cheeks, leaving them pale. He stared at Anderson as if fascinated.

Anderson's lips moved. He was speaking to Wilson.

"Talk after me, you polecat!" he said. "Say what I say, or the lead in this gun will run together goin' through you!"

Wilson's face was shadowed with the gray pallor of death. He glanced quickly to right and left and saw people running toward him; he saw Ella standing near, her hands clasped over her breast; he looked straight at Anderson and observed in his eyes the gleam of an inexorable and deadly purpose.

A silence came. People had stopped running. It seemed the entire camp was grouped about the actors in this drama. But no sound broke the terrible stillness.

Wilson knew that death had singled him out. He would need to make no movement to meet it, for it was in front of him, waiting for him. And he knew also that afterward no one would molest Anderson, even as no one offered to interfere with him now. The woman was standing there. Her manner plainly revealed that she had been offended. None knew what the offense had been, but that it had been sufficient was evident by the fact that it had produced a gun. Therefore the tragedy must work itself out.

"I promise——" came Anderson's voice, cold and deliberate.

Wilson licked his lips. Red again surged into his face. His gaze wavered, dropped.

"I—promise——" he repeated, his voice husky.

"Never again to insult a woman!"

"Never again to insult a woman," repeated Wilson.

"And to get out of this camp before sundown."

"And to get out of this camp before sundown."

"Or wait here until Brazo comes."

"Or wait here until Brazo comes."

"And repeat to him what I said to Ella Wainright!"

"And repeat to him what I said to Ella Wainright."

"That's all," said Anderson. "Now get out of here. And stay out. If you come sneakin' around here again, I'll bore you before you can say 'scat!'"

Anderson stood motionless, watching Wilson until the latter shouldered his way through the fringing crowd and vanished behind a row of tents near the river. People lingered after Wilson went, but Ella ran swiftly to the cabin, while Anderson holstered his gun and walked toward the group of cowboys of his outfit, who had been standing at a little distance, watching.

There was little activity in the town during the remainder of the day. The groups in front of the tents and the saloons grew larger. People were waiting. Anderson's words had been definite, although they provided an alternative.

Would Wilson leave town before sundown, or would he wait and tell Brazo what he had told Ella Wainright?

No man knew. Few of them had ever seen Brazo. But it seemed that some had heard of him, and there were some who shook their heads sagely and said that if they were Wilson they would not do any waiting to speak of.

Wilson was not to be seen. It was whispered that he was in a tent over near the river, and that, ashamed, he was planning to sneak out of town in the darkness of night.

But sundown came and Wilson did not appear. And he did not steal away in the darkness as the whisperers had said. For when the sunlight of the morning flooded the basin, Wilson was seen working over a fire in front of his tent, calmly cooking his breakfast.

CHAPTER XXI

THE land commissioner at Deming had gone to Washington, and his records were locked in an iron safe and could not be seen. The commissioner would be absent several months.

That was what Brazo discovered upon his arrival in Deming.

However, Brazo found a lawyer and asked advice. The lawyer told him he would write to Washington and get whatever information might be obtained. Whatever came from Washington would be final, of course, and the records would be straight. He smiled at Brazo when he said that, and Brazo gathered that the lawyer had little faith in Kuneen. But, meanwhile, said the lawyer, there was nothing to be done. In the absence of the commissioner, Kuneen was in charge.

"If Kuneen is crooked, he's picked out the right time to raid you," the lawyer declared. "If he and his crew don't find any gold, Kuneen can say that a mistake has been made, and there'll be no harm done. If they find gold, they'll have made a clean-up by the time things can be straightened out. I'll do the best I can."

Brazo headed Blinky homeward. When he reached the ridge at the southern rim of the basin, he had been absent two weeks, and the devils of his imagination had tortured him. In two weeks much could have happened.

Anderson could have won Ella. Two weeks of constant companionship would be enough. Enough for Anderson, for Ella had liked Anderson from the beginning.

His thoughts were ironic, cynical. His philosophy of life had changed. Once he had had faith in people, in the honesty of their impulses, their actions, their intentions. People tried to do right and were generous, sympathetic. Sure, people made mistakes, but on the whole they were helpful, tolerant, and obliging. There was good in every man which you could find if you looked for it. So he had thought.

He had discovered that he had been mistaken. People were greedy, selfish, always seeking a mean advantage. When they had what they wanted, one could get along with them well enough, but if they were eager for anything, they would fight among themselves like a pack of animals.

Take the people of the new town, for example. He sat motionless in the saddle on the crest of the ridge and gazed at the inhabitants among their tents and shacks. They were scurrying around, hustling here and there, digging, bartering, trading, stealing, fighting. They seemed to have but one object in life, and that was to get money.

A great disgust seized him. Rage over their shamelessness assailed him, to mingle with the pangs of his jealousy.

He had never known jealousy until he had met Ella, until Anderson had come, and he had been amazed at the vividness of the mental pictures his imagination had drawn for him. He had seen Anderson and Ella so clearly that they might have been before him in reality.

And in every mental vision he had of them, Anderson and Ella were smiling at each other!

Not ordinary smiles, casual smiles, polite smiles, or merely smiles of friendliness. But smiles that held significance, articulate smiles expressing a secret understanding, a knowledge of each other's thoughts, confiding, eloquent, beautiful smiles!

He squirmed now in the keen agony of impotence. There was nothing he could do. He couldn't blame Anderson for falling in love with the girl, for he had fallen in love with her even before he had met her. And he couldn't accuse Ella of unfaithfulness, for she had never given him a sign that she cared for him. On the other hand, he thought she had made it plain to him that she cared for Anderson.

He wouldn't attempt to interfere, and yet he knew that, if Anderson got her, he would always be jealous of Anderson. And he knew he would have to stay near Ella until she made it known that she would take Anderson.

He couldn't leave, for there would always be with him the thought that if he had stayed he might have won her.

Win her without trying to win her! That was what would have to happen, for he had never exerted himself to win her, even to please her, and he knew he never would, because he hadn't vanity enough, or conceit enough, to think he was worthy of her. He was a silent worshipper. If he could not go to her and tell her in one burst of words that he intended to marry her, he could never make her understand at all. He hadn't the grace of manner to attract her interest, or the steady deter-

mination to win her little by little. When he was in her presence, he was never sure of himself. He was embarrassed, mute, vacillating.

But there was no uncertainty in his attitude toward Kuneen and Wilson and the others who were trying to take her land away. He knew exactly where he stood there! There was no mental wavering in his intentions toward them!

He crossed the basin and reached the western edge of town. The greedy searchers who had so unceremoniously invaded Ella's land had finally irritated him, and he was in a truculent mood as he rode past the various tents and shanties that dotted the section. Perhaps his irritation was due in part to his reflections about Anderson's occupancy of the cabin during his absence, but the state of his feeling toward the men in the camp was more definite.

His lips curved a little when he observed that the men he passed seemed reluctant to meet his gaze. Word of his coming seemed to have preceded him, or perhaps they had seen him riding across the basin. At any rate, he perceived that, as he rode along, the way was magically cleared for him. Groups broke up at his approach, men in twos and threes moved out of his vision, to vanish behind tents or into shanties. None spoke to him, nodded to him, waved a hand, or otherwise visibly noticed him. Several men stood motionless as he passed them, pretending they had not seen him. But after he passed he could feel them staring at him.

It seemed to him that there was a nameless menace in the atmosphere. Not menace, perhaps, but certainly expectation. He found himself affected by it, curious.

As he rode, he searched the various faces that were turned toward his, seeking some sign which would explain the mystery. But the faces he saw were stony, expressionless. If they revealed anything, he could not read it.

As he neared the cabin where he would find Ella, he suddenly became aware that all sound had ceased, with the exception of a subdued hammering that apparently came from the new ranch house.

He did not go directly to the cabin, but turned his horse into the corral, shouldered his saddle, and, with the bridle hanging in the crook of an elbow, entered the stable. He was emerging from the stable door when he saw stepping out of the cabin door the short man who had stared at him in the saloon the day he had had his beard shaved off!

Brazo paused in the stable doorway and stared thoughtfully at the short man, who was walking toward the river. The short man was smiling.

Pleased! What about?

Brazo was not pleased. He was still puzzled about the short man. He still felt that he had met the short man somewhere, sometime, but he had not been able to spur his recreant memory to activity upon that point. Recognition slumbered back in his consciousness, a name seemed to linger on the tip of his tongue but would not be spoken.

He could not imagine why the short man had visited the cabin, and he was aware of a distinct antagonism, a savage hostility which annoyed him because it had no apparent justification. The cynical, ironic mood which had seized him while he had been on the southern ridge

gazing at the camp was still with him as he walked from the stable to the cabin and paused in the doorway to look inside.

He saw Ella sitting at the kitchen table. Her head was bowed in her hands and she did not hear him until he stepped inside and stood near one of the door jambs looking at her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, straightening. "It's you!"

Brazo perceived her quick embarrassment, the flood of colour that instantly suffused her face, the shadow that came into her eyes, as if to veil them against the steady inquiry of his.

"It's me," he answered.

She appeared to be agitated. Her lips were pressed tightly together, her hands were clasped; her eyes did not completely veil some emotion which was so elusive that Brazo could not catch it. However, he felt it was an emotion that had been aroused by the short man's visit.

"Having company?" he asked.

"Mr. Brinn," she answered. Her flush grew deeper. "He just left," she added.

Brinn!

The name was not familiar. He was certain that he had never heard it before. Yet he was almost positive that the short man was not a stranger to him.

"Brinn, eh?" he said. "A friend of yours?"

"Ye-es," she said, and Brazo knew that Brinn was not her friend. He waited, thinking that perhaps she would volunteer more information about Brinn. But no other information came, and he could not ask her for it.

With an inward smile, he stood silent as she changed the subject.

"Well," she said, "what did you discover?"

"Not much," he answered. He told her of his experience in Deming, adding: "We're not likely to get any help there soon. We've got to work this thing out ourselves."

She seemed disappointed and stared at the tablecloth.

Through a silence, Brazo gazed about the cabin. He was searching for signs that Anderson had occupied the bunk, had taken his meals in the cabin. There were no such signs. There was no article of Anderson's clothing on any of the corner hooks, where he had been accustomed to hang his own.

"You been bothered by anybody?" he asked.

"No."

She did not look at him when she answered, but Brazo, watching her closely, observed that a shiver ran over her.

Something had happened! Something that she did not mean to tell him about!

He stood, gravely regarding her, wondering. Was Brinn responsible for her agitation? Anderson?

But how was he to question her about Anderson? Unless she voluntarily confided in him, he could get nowhere. He had no right to ask her anything about Anderson, or any other man, for that matter. And the questions he wanted to ask her would seem absurd if spoken aloud. But to him they were important. They were vital to him. They were: "Was Anderson here with you every night? Did he take his meals with you? How often did you sit outside with Anderson at night,

talking? Do you like Anderson better now than when I left? Has Anderson a chance to marry you?"

"So you haven't been bothered," he said aloud, slowly.

She shook her head and still she would not look at him. She knew that, if she told him what Wilson had said, he would instantly find Wilson and—and—perhaps be killed. She didn't want him to be killed, and so she had decided not to tell him. She had also warned Anderson against telling him. She had expected to be able to conceal her agitation, but felt she was not doing so, and she forced herself to look at him, priding herself that she was calm.

However, Brazo detected the worry in her eyes, and his thoughts again centred upon Anderson. Anderson had done something he shouldn't have done!

"So nothing has happened?" persisted Brazo.

"Nothing."

"Camp been quiet?"

She nodded.

"Kuneen been around?"

"He was here once, for a few minutes. He was disappointed that a great deal of gold hadn't been found, and he questioned me as to whether Jim had left any word telling where he had made his strike. I made him understand that it was none of his business what Jim had done."

"That was right," Brazo approved. "So they haven't struck anything yet!" he exulted. "Well, I reckon Kuneen would be disappointed."

He was still thinking about Anderson staying in the cabin with her. Although he himself had never achieved

any sort of intimacy with her, there was a chance that Anderson, with his handsome face and engaging personality, might have succeeded in interesting her further. She had sat outside with Anderson in the evenings, she had said good-night to him many times, she had met him the first thing in the morning, had sat opposite him at the table; there must have been long hours when they had sat together in the cabin, talking.

Again the stabbing pangs of jealousy tortured him.

"Anderson give you much trouble?" he asked.

"Why, no, of course not!" she answered, looking straight at him. "He never has. Anderson is wonderful!"

Sure. Anderson was wonderful. She had always liked Anderson. And now, having been on terms of closer intimacy with him for two weeks, she liked him better than ever. There had been a frank sincerity in her voice.

"So you wasn't lonesome," he said. He was unable to keep a slight trace of derision from his voice.

"Well, yes, I was," she said quickly, remembering the long nights when, fearing, she had heard every slight sound outside the cabin.

Brazo's pulses leaped. Anderson hadn't filled every need, after all. Perhaps, in spite of her liking for Anderson, she had not felt secure with him.

"Well," he said, "I've always found Anderson good company."

"What has that to do with it?" she asked.

"Quite a bit, I reckon," he said. "Anderson is a good talker. Of course, the nights are long, and with only two to talk, time sort of drags along. But I always found Anderson interesting."

She grew rigid and seemed to gaze at him in startled wonder.

"What do you mean?" she asked coldly. "Do you think I had Anderson stay here with me while you were gone?"

"Why, sure," he answered. "You said you'd have him. And somebody had to stay. I asked you to have him stay."

She got up quickly. Her face was pale and her eyes flashing, and she smiled at him with stiff and scornful lips. He stood watching her while she walked close to him and stood within a foot of him. Her breath was coming fast and her breast was heaving with emotion.

"If you say another word I shall slap your face!" she declared.

For an instant she stood rigid, erect, disdainful. Then without speaking to him again, she quickly turned, went into her room, and slammed the door.

Brazo stood where she had left him, amazed and puzzled. He heard her sobbing, and a quick perspiration started on his forehead. He removed his hat and stared lugubriously at the floor.

"Now what in blazes have I done?" was the bewildered interrogation he directed at himself. "I asked her to have Anderson stay in the cabin while I was gone. She said she would. She didn't, and when I tell her I thought he did, she goes all to pieces!"

He went outside to the bench and sat in the sun with his hat off. His face was long and his thoughts doleful.

"I've done it now," he decided.

Whatever he had done seemed to have been plenty. Women were queer. A man couldn't anticipate their

thoughts. She had stayed in the cabin with him and she didn't like him any too well. He had told her that he had thought she had stayed in the cabin with a man he knew she liked, and she had become furiously angry.

His sympathy for her was deep and stirring and yet in it was a queer exultation over his discovery that Anderson hadn't stayed in the cabin with her, after all. She hadn't sat at the table smiling at him, she hadn't sat outside on the bench with him in the moonlight, talking. She had been alone in the cabin during his entire absence. The thought thrilled him, the dignity of her conduct awed him. At one stroke she had vanished the demons of his jealousy and revealed to him the grotesqueness of the mental pictures he had drawn of her and Anderson. He had wronged her. He had wronged Anderson. He was deeply remorseful, and less hopeful than ever of winning her. But his exultation persisted.

For the first time in weeks he was able to talk with Anderson without hating him. He found Anderson working on the ranch house, which was nearly completed, and in an instant Anderson was telling him about Wilson.

"He's still here," said Anderson. "She didn't want me to tell you about it, but of course you've got to know."

CHAPTER XXII

WOLF WILSON had no intention of leaving the new town, nor had he any longing to meet Brazo in an open encounter. Previous experience with Brazo had convinced him of the latter's superiority in any kind of a fight, and though Wilson's hatred was deep and violent, he was aware that he could not indulge it when facing his enemy. He had already had a week or more to meditate upon the crisis which was soon to confront him, and when he saw Brazo riding homeward across the basin, he was not prepared for the clash that he knew would come.

His men were away, driving a herd of stolen cattle southward into Sonora, and he had entertained a hope that they would return before Brazo. They hadn't returned, and here was Brazo nearing the cabin, where he would learn from Ella or Anderson the news that would send him, fighting mad, to search the camp.

Wilson could not depend upon Kuneen. The deputy commissioner was not a fighting man, and when they had made the agreement to raid the camp, Kuneen had stipulated that he was to remain invisible in any physical action that might result. He could explain a "mistake" in his interpretation of the laws governing the allotting of land, but he would not undertake to appear as an aggressor in a fight. As a matter of fact,

he admitted to Wilson that he didn't like Brazo's looks.

Wilson had no other friends or acquaintances at the camp except the short man, Jack Brinn. And twice when he talked with Brinn about Brazo, the short man had avoided making a decision.

"There's time enough for that when you see him comin'," he had said. He had narrowed his eyes at Wilson. "Why don't you get out of town?" he asked. "You can always come back with your men."

Wilson shook his head.

"I ain't runnin'!" he declared. "I've got as much right in this camp as he has!" He glared silently into Brinn's eyes. "Far as that goes, he'll have to look out for himself. If he comes gunnin' for me an' I see him first, I ain't goin' to give him no warnin'!"

Brinn covertly studied Wilson.

"See you to-morrow," he said.

That conversation had occurred the day before, and upon it Wilson had built his hope. He was aware that Brinn was deep and clever. Brinn never worked, never appeared to be engaged in a productive occupation, yet he always had money. Brinn used his brains!

From the front of his tent in a section of the camp where an irregular street had been formed, Wilson had watched Brazo on his homeward ride across the basin. Sullenly, he had observed him turn his horse into the corral; with vengeful, hating gaze, he saw Brazo carry saddle and bridle to the stable and then stand in the door for an instant.

In that instant, Jack Brinn emerged from the door of the cabin occupied by Ella Wainright!

What had Brinn been doing in there?

Wilson could not even offer a satisfying conjecture. Brinn's trail was hard to anticipate.

It seemed to Wilson that Brazo was equally puzzled. For Brazo had perceptibly started and stiffened, and for an instant it had seemed to Wilson that Brazo meditated stopping Brinn, to question him. But no. Brinn went his way, smiling, while Brazo, hesitating for a time, and watching Brinn out of sight, went to the cabin and entered.

Wilson stepped into his tent and got his rifle. He knew his Colt was ready, but he did not intend to rely upon that unless it was absolutely necessary. Now that Brazo was in camp, Wilson knew that he could never endure watching him as he approached upon the errand that could have only one meaning. A panic had seized him, and he knew that, if he saw Brazo coming toward him, he would begin shooting at him with the rifle before Brazo could get close enough to use his forty-five. He was not going to take any chances with Brazo. Better to kill him and take a chance on getting away than to stay and be buried in the new graveyard on the southern slope of the ridge.

Wilson stood at the front of his tent examining the rifle. Brinn had vanished. Then there was a rustle of canvas behind Wilson, and Brinn, grinning widely, appeared at the flap of the tent.

Wilson's nerves were so taut that they jerked his body spasmodically as he turned.

"You fool!" he snarled in the reaction following his fright. "What in hell do you want to go to sneakin' up on a man that way for?"

"Thought at first it was Brazo, eh?" grinned Brinn.

"Well, I reckon that's the way he'll ketch you. You see him? He's on the prod about somethin', an' he ain't been told about you insultin' Ella Wainright. I reckon, when he does hear it, he'll come a-rearin'."

"I seen him," said Wilson. His face had whitened, his eyes held a wild gleam. "I ain't doin' no waitin'. I'm hidin' out here. When I see him comin', I'm goin' to throw down on him with my rifle!"

"I heard Bill Widener tellin' some boys he expected you'd do that," said Brinn. "He was sayin' he didn't like you, an' that, if you pulled off any funny business like that, he'd hang you! Better play her square, Wilson," he warned.

Brinn was watching Wilson with a cool alertness which had a hint of slyness in it. Brinn's brain was evidently functioning with its normal activity.

Wilson shook his head with a sullen negative.

"I don't care a damn what Widener said!" he declared. "No town marshal is goin' to bring me back to life after Brazo kills me! I'll take a chance on Widener. I'd a heap rather shoot it out with Widener than with Brazo!"

Brinn's eyes were bright. His gaze was roving here and there. He looked at the tents flanking Wilson's, at another row opposite which formed the far side of the rough and irregular street. He saw that the inhabitants of the town, no doubt anticipating the impending trouble, were gathering in groups which were slowly moving toward where he and Wilson were standing. At a little distance down the river stood Widener, the marshal. He had his arms folded over his chest, but there could be no doubt that he was watching. He saw

Brazo emerge from the cabin and walk toward the new ranch house, where he talked with Anderson.

Brinn smiled.

"It's comin' soon!" he warned. "Look here, Wilson," he added quickly. "You're makin' a mistake. Suppose Brazo don't come for you right away, but holds off. Suppose he waits till dark an' sneaks up on you when you ain't lookin'? What good will your rifle do you then?"

Wilson scowled. It was evident that he hadn't thought of the contingency suggested by Brinn. He fidgeted.

"Chuck your rifle inside the tent," advised Brinn. "Go in there an' take your gun off an' your gun belt. Come out an' go about your business. Stand here, or walk around a little. But don't go far from your tent. Brazo can't kill you when you ain't armed. He won't try. But he'll want to kill you, an' he'll pull his gun. There'll be a gang watchin' every move. They'll see him draw his gun. You ain't got any gun. Well, we're friends. I'll get in my tent across the street. I'll be inside holdin' a bead on Brazo when he comes. When he draws his gun on you I down him. Widener or nobody else is goin' to kick on that! That's self-defense, ain't it?"

Wilson's eyes brightened and he drew a deep breath of relief. Colour began to return to his face.

"You'll sure shoot if he bends his gun on me?" he asked Brinn.

"Sure," assured Brinn. "You're safe." He turned from Wilson to conceal a smile of contempt. Then he again faced Wilson and added: "I'm goin'. Brazo won't do any delayin'. You take your time, though. Hang

around here a few minutes, then go into your tent an' chuck your gun an' rifle. After that, come out an' pretend you ain't seein' anything."

Brinn crossed the street and entered his tent. He stood back in it a little and peered through a hole in the flap at Wilson, who was still outside his own tent, pretending an extravagant unconcern. Again Brinn grinned his contempt.

"Shucks," he said aloud, "I ain't runnin' no chance of him killin' Brazo—now!"

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Brazo left Anderson, he went again into the stable, where he twirled the cylinder of his six-shooter and blew through the long barrel to remove any dust that had collected in it. He would have gone into the cabin to clean and oil the weapon, but he did not want Ella to learn of his intentions.

Of course, he now knew what had caused her agitation. The public insult, or at least the incident which had followed it, was now common knowledge. The thought that he had compromised Ella's reputation by living in the cabin with her had not occurred to him. It had been his experience that such things had happened before, and, in fact, several similar situations had come under his observation. In no instance had there been any scandal attached to such incidents. Conditions very often made such situations necessary or inevitable. Lack of room, misfortune, circumstances were to be considered.

Wilson would misinterpret a man's intentions. Deliberately, perhaps, but, deliberately or otherwise, the thought had been in his mind. He had spread the poison of suspicion and had dared to remain in town in spite of Anderson's warning. That meant, of course, that he would shoot Brazo on sight.

When Brazo again emerged from the stable, he be-

came aware that his movements were being observed by all the inhabitants of the town. He did not gaze directly at anyone, but his wide, inclusive glances, seeking Wilson, brought all the other inhabitants under his observation. People were standing in front of their tents and buildings. Some were sitting on the seats of wagons, others were lounging on benches, boxes. Back of him, to the left and right and in front of him, were faces. All were turned in his direction. All, in one way or another, were attempting to conceal the fact that they were interested in his movements.

A man seated on a box at a distance was whittling a branch of chaparral. He was not devoting his attention to his task, but was watching Brazo. Another man was greasing a wagon axle. He was smearing the grease on the axle with a stick, but the stick was making weird gyrations and not touching the iron at all. Other men were talking together but were not looking at one another. A man in a little gully was saddling a horse. He had the saddle on the animal's back and was reaching under to grasp the cinch strap, which eluded his blind search. His arm waved here and there, ludicrously groping, his gaze was on Brazo. At last he ceased searching for the dangling strap, stood erect, and frankly stared.

Work on the ranch house had been suspended. Anderson, Hardin, and the other cowboys were standing near a corner of the cabin. Brazo knew that, as soon as he moved, Anderson and the others would move with him. They would watch from the rear to see that Wilson did not shoot from behind.

Brazo walked slowly away from the stable. He knew that, though he had not personally sent word to Wil-

son, he would be expected to conform to the unwritten code. Wilson had been warned. Wilson could wait where he chose to wait. He could conceal himself and step out unexpectedly, surprising his enemy. He could lie in wait at a corner, in a tent, in one of the saloons—anywhere. He could suddenly appear behind Brazo and call, to shoot, legitimately, the instant Brazo turned. The one thing Wilson could not do was what Anderson feared he would do—shoot from behind without warning.

Brazo therefore did not know where Wilson could be found. He strode slowly westward, to the farthest tent in that direction, turned, and came back eastward.

People stood rigid as he passed, but he gave them no attention except to scan their faces. He was passing a saloon when a whispered word floated to him:

"He's in front of his tent! Next street!"

Brazo heard the voice but did not heed it. He knew he had no friends here. But on the chance that there might be someone in the town who wished him well, he kept the words in mind as he finished seeking among the first two irregular lines of tents and buildings and passed northward to the second. And then, at a little distance, he observed Wilson.

As the whisper had said, Wilson was standing in front of his tent. His back was toward Brazo and he was apparently repairing the front door flap. It seemed he was sewing a rent in the canvas. At any rate, he was obviously not expecting Brazo to call upon him.

So it seemed to all those who were following Brazo, and to those who closed in from the sides.

But Wilson knew what was happening. He had seen

Brazo when the latter first began to move toward him, and out of the corners of his eyes, while appearing to be interested in the tent flap, he had observed Brazo walking up and down the other street searching. He knew now from the dead silence which had fallen that Brazo had seen him and would presently come toward him. Yet Wilson did not turn or give any indication that he knew of his enemy's presence. He glanced once at the tent into which Jack Brinn had vanished, and when he observed a rifle muzzle projecting from a small rent in the canvas, he smiled with a certain grim slyness.

Brazo walked slowly through the deep dust toward Wilson. Brazo's hands were hanging at his sides, though not for an instant, as he continued to approach his enemy, did his gaze wander from the other's back. For he was convinced that Wilson had seen him, knew he was approaching and intended presently to turn swiftly and shoot. He watched for the slow gathering of the muscles that would precede the turning movement. Meanwhile, he continued to shorten the distance between himself and Wilson.

Presently, perhaps a dozen feet from Wilson, he stopped.

Wilson still worked at the tent flap. He was not unaware of Brazo's presence behind him, for Brazo could see the muscles of the back of his neck quivering.

Brazo's hands were still hanging at his sides. He now dropped his right shoulder a little, his knees went forward a trifle to give to his muscles the proper tension for the infinitesimal leftward movement he always made when drawing his gun, his right arm moved slightly outward, the hand open, poised.

"Wilson!" he exclaimed sharply.

Wilson turned swiftly, pretending that Brazo's voice, reaching him unexpectedly, had startled him. He had planned the movement, knowing there were many witnesses, and had anticipated that he would present the spectacle of an unarmed man being menaced by a gun in the hand of an enemy who had sought him to kill him. He turned, expecting to look into the muzzle of Brazo's gun, expecting to hear Jack Brinn's rifle crack, to see Brazo stagger and fall.

Nothing of the kind happened.

Brazo had not drawn a gun. He stood where he had been standing when he had called to Wilson, his muscles rigid, his right hand poised. He had made no attempt to draw, had decided to permit Wilson to make the first hostile movement. He hated Wilson but would give him an even chance. Now he observed that there was no gun in Wilson's holster.

A ripple of laughter broke the strained stillness, for Wilson's face was dolorous with disappointment that he could not conceal. Impending tragedy was to be replaced by comedy.

"Yellow!" said Brazo.

"I didn't know you was in town," declared Wilson.

There came another ripple of laughter.

"You're a liar, Wilson," said Brazo. "If there was anything else I could call you that I thought would make you fight I'd say it. But there's no word that will describe a man that will insult a woman."

Brazo turned slightly and glanced into the faces nearest him.

"Men," he said coldly, "I can't shoot a thing like this. What shall be done with him?"

"Step on him!" shouted a man near by.

"Let's run him out of town!" suggested another.

Wilson's brain was rioting in a chaos of malignant passion, and his hatred of Brazo had been intensified to an infuriation that blinded him. He was not quite the coward they judged him to be. He had been reluctant to face Brazo's gun, for he knew from experience exactly what the result would be. He had been amazed over the failure of his plan, and was somewhat abashed by the spectacle he had made of himself because of his disappointment, but his rage over this humiliation was not to be governed. Silently, his eyes alight with a terrible frenzy, he leaped across the space that separated him from Brazo and struck furiously at the face of his enemy.

The crowd surged forward, yelling with delight and forming a huge ring around the two men.

Wilson's rush had been unexpected, and though in his blind fury he had missed the first blow, the force of his attack had thrown him so heavily against Brazo that both went down in a cloud of dust that instantly billowed over them and hid them from sight.

For a few minutes they rolled, locked together, their arms and legs occasionally projecting from the smother. Then they were up and both unrecognizable because of the dust that covered them. They came together again with a sound like that made by a flat board striking the surface of smooth water, and one of them plunged out of the dust cloud and landed heavily on a shoulder. It was Wilson, for there was no gun in the holster at his right hip.

It was Wilson, for they caught a good glimpse of him as he stood for an instant after getting to his feet, swaying, rubbing the dust from his eyes with the back of a hand. They lost sight of him again as he rushed and the erupting dust covered him.

There was no science in their fighting or in their movements. Strength was opposed to strength, endurance to endurance. Many blows missed, but those that reached their mark had the power and fury of intense hatred behind them, and they landed heavily, paralyzing and deadening the flesh, smashing, macerating it.

They came together near Wilson's tent, toppled into it and went down, fighting furiously, into the yielding canvas. The stakes holding the guy ropes gave way, the ropes themselves flew upward writhing like snakes; the ridge pole cracked and broke, the end poles buckled and snapped. The canvas heaved and billowed around and about the threshing bodies of the two men, tin cooking utensils clattered out of the wreck.

They rose and fought in the débris. Until now the narrowing circle of witnesses had been unable to determine which man held the advantage. They had appeared to be evenly matched, but now the watchers observed that Brazo was forcing the fighting.

Contact with the canvas had removed a great deal of the dust from them, and again they were distinguishable as distinct and separate entities.

Blood trickled from a cut on Brazo's right cheek, but he was grinning as though enjoying the experience. He kept close to Wilson, giving him no time to rest or to set himself for a blow.

Wilson had been fearfully punished. His left eye was

closed, his right discoloured, his lips were smashed and puffed. He was retreating from Brazo, his legs bending at the knees, his feet dragging.

He circled out into the dust, away from the wreck of the tent and toward the middle of the street. There, stiffening his lagging muscles, he made a final stand. Twice he struck viciously, only to miss and stagger under Brazo's smashing counters. Once he went to his knees and leaned his weight on his hands, and Brazo leaned over him to ask him if he was "through."

Wilson's answer was to stagger to his feet. He stood, his hands hanging limply at his sides, exhausted and defenseless. But his hate was as bitter as ever, and he lurched toward Brazo, gripping the latter and hanging on.

Brazo would not hit the man again, but attempted to break his grip and shove him off. He heard a voice—Anderson's—cry sharply, felt his gun leave its holster. Wilson had drawn it!

Aware of Wilson's murderous intentions, Brazo wrenched himself free and in the break drove a fist with terrific force into his enemy's stomach. Wilson staggered back, his body doubled forward from the force of the blow, Brazo's gun in his right hand. He tried to swing the muzzle of the gun toward Brazo, but Brazo's right fist had already started. It swished in a wide sweep and landed with a queer, splitting sound. The gun dropped from Wilson's fingers and Wilson stumbled sideways, turning as he fell and landing face down in the deep dust.

No one moved. If there had been any sympathy for Wilson, his action in drawing Brazo's gun had dissipated

it. The end had come in silence, and there was no sound as Brazo stood, dust-covered and grim, gazing down at his enemy.

Even Wilson made no sound.

Then a man whispered, and his voice seemed resonant.

"In Brazo's place, I'd have killed him!" he said.

"He's got it comin' to him," said another. This was Widener, the marshal. He stood back a little, his arms folded over his chest, one hand caressing his chin. "But that man Brazo keeps his head," he added.

Brazo was brushing the dust from his clothes. He saw Anderson and Hardin and the other Wainright men standing in the circle that had formed about him, and he smiled faintly at them. They knew from the smile that he was not yet through with Wilson.

"He'll finish it!" declared Anderson. "He don't do nothin' halfway!"

"He's a——!" said one of the Wainright cowboys, applying lovingly an unprintable name.

Wilson was a long time recovering. His first movement was a tentative lifting of his right arm, which instantly dropped into the dust again. Later, he got both arms under himself and began to raise himself. He got into a sitting position and for some time sat there swaying back and forth, blinking at the circle of watchers. Finally, he appeared to remember what had happened. He flushed and lowered his head. Then he got up and stood sneering at the faces he saw.

Then Brazo moved toward him, stood in front of him.

"You thinking straight again, Wilson?" said Brazo.

Wilson nodded his head.

"All right, then," Brazo went on; "remember this: You've got an hour to get out of this camp. Not wearing a gun won't help you this time. Understand?"

Brazo turned from Wilson and walked toward the river, vanishing far upstream behind a clump of alder and aspen.

The men of the camp watched him out of sight and then began to drift away from Wilson.

"Gone to clean up a bit, I reckon," said Anderson as Brazo disappeared. "Well, we'll keep an eye on this jasper!"

Anderson and the other Wainright men retreated a little distance, where they dropped into a grass clump.

But there was no need of their watching Wilson. He walked to his tent and dropped upon it, sitting there for fully half an hour before he moved. Then he got up and began to gather his belongings. Before his allotted hour had gone, he was mounting a saddle horse and leading a pack horse westward.

"He's goin'," said Anderson, still watching. "But he ain't through. His kind never are until they're killed. I reckon Brazo will have to do that before this thing is settled."

CHAPTER XXIV

BRAZO beat the dust out of his clothes, bathed, stopped the flow of blood from the cut on his cheek, dressed, and watched Wilson leave the camp. He saw Anderson and the other Wainright men go back to their work on the ranch house, but he delayed his own return because he felt that he did not care to meet Ella so soon after the fight. She would find out about it, he knew, if she had not seen it, and she would ask questions.

He did not want to answer any questions. More, especially, he did not want Ella to get the impression that he had fought Wilson solely on account of the insult that had been offered her. She would think that, of course, but he knew more. He had fought Wilson because of the bad feeling that had been between them from the first day of their acquaintance. At any rate, even if he had fought Wilson because of what the latter had said to her, he didn't want her to think so.

He was nursing resentment. Not particularly because of her threat to slap his face, but because of the contemptuous disdain he had seen in her eyes when she had uttered the threat. He had had very little experience with women, and he did not know that he had insulted her quite as thoroughly as Wilson had insulted her, harbouring the thought that she would permit Anderson to occupy the cabin with her during his absence.

In the parallel was a fine distinction that Brazo could not comprehend. However, he could understand the contempt he had seen in her eyes.

At first he had been satisfied to know that Anderson had not stayed in the cabin at all, but since then the recollection of the light in her eyes when she had scornfully left him to go to her room had overwhelmed his satisfaction.

"If I'd look at a man like that, I'd sure hate him!" was his decision, voiced mentally as he strode slowly through the camp. "There'd be no liking in me for a man I could look at like she looked at me. She's not liking my style, and that's all there is to it. If I had said anything to hurt her, she'd have reason to act like that. The point is that she did it without having any reason."

Hopeless, that's what it was. He was a fool to hang around longer. Yet he knew he would hang around and that he would continue to hope, even though his resentment grew. He was under the spell of her, and he couldn't go away.

And now self-derision prodded at him. He'd grown soft. He no longer had any will power. He could be led around, mistreated, abused, but still he'd hang around and yearn like a lovesick boy.

He walked down one of the tented streets until he came to a big frame building which he knew was a saloon. He stood in front of the place for a while gloomily regarding the cabin and listening to the voices that floated out of the doorway beside him. Suddenly realizing that he was thirsty, he abruptly entered, walked to the bar, and ordered beer.

His money belt he had left in the cabin, but there

were several gold pieces in his pockets. He paid for his drink with one of the coins and stood, leaning against the bar, his change in front of him, thinking about Ella.

He had glanced once around the room as he had entered and had observed that, besides himself and the bartender, there was only one occupant, a man, and that he sat at a table idly playing with a deck of cards. There were other tables, a doorway leading to a rear room through which he could see some gambling paraphernalia, some chairs, and a nickel organ.

He stood for a long time with the glass in front of him, untouched. When he finally lifted the glass and drank from it he observed the bartender regarding him with an ingratiating smile.

"Some fight!" declared the bartender. "Wilson got what was comin' to him. You were cool. I looked to see you kill him, though, when he grabbed your gun. I think you made a mistake in not doin' it."

Brazo smiled. He had almost forgotten the fight.

"You saw it, eh?" he said. "Well, it didn't amount to much. I got tired, hitting him."

"Well, if you was tired then, I'd like to see you when you was goin' good!"

Here was praise for the victor. Yet somehow Brazo got the impression that the man was insincere, that his apparent good will was artificial. For Brazo knew that he was not liked by the people of the camp, that he and Ella had been anathematized because they had not publicly divulged the location of the claim from which Jim Wainright had taken his gold.

Brazo finished drinking and walked to the front door, where he stood for a time looking at the camp. It was

the first time he had seen the camp from one of its streets —except when he had passed through it searching for Wilson—and it seemed different to him, and strange. For one thing, there was rather more order in the arrangement of the tents and buildings than there had appeared to be when looking at it from the cabin. In a crude way it was a town, and there were more frame buildings than tents. There was system in all the activity. From a distance it had seemed that the people were aimlessly running about, but now he observed that all had definite purposes and some pride in the appearance of their places. They were doing their best with the materials at hand.

Next door to the saloon building was another frame structure. A dwelling, he decided. He merely glanced at it and had finished his fleeting inspection when he became aware that a woman stood in the doorway of the dwelling, smiling at him. He returned the smile, for the woman was young and pretty. She was a camp parasite, however, with the boldness of her type expressed in her eyes.

Brazo turned away, and his gaze went to the cabin.

He saw Ella standing in the cabin doorway. She seemed to be looking downward, though, and not at him, and though he had done nothing wrong in smiling at the girl in the dwelling next door, he stepped quickly back into the saloon, assailed with a sudden sensation of guilt and filled with a hope that Ella had not seen him.

His resentment flamed again. Suppose she had seen him? Hadn't she threatened to slap his face? Hadn't she shown him that she hated him? Why should he continue to shape his conduct to accord with her rules?

Then it occurred to him that she had not laid down any rules for him and that it had been his own mood which had just now been responsible for the feeling of guilt which had seized him. He was still trying to appear worthy to her.

Vastly perturbed, he went again to the bar. He was drinking when he heard a rustle beside him. He turned and saw the woman of the dwelling standing close to him, smiling up at him.

A blush started from his neck and suffused his face. But he grinned at her and said: "How did you get in here so quick? A minute ago I saw you standing in front of the shack next door!"

She smiled. "It's been fully five minutes," she said. "I thought I would never get over here!"

"So you hustled, eh?" he said. "See somebody you liked?"

"You!"

The bartender was now standing with his back to the bar. He was drying some glasses and pyramiding them on a crude sideboard covered with a muslin cloth.

Brazo shook his head.

"Woman and me parted company some time ago," he said.

"You'll let me drink with you, though?"

Brazo bought her a drink, which she carried to one of the tables, motioning him to follow. He sat down opposite her and looked at her with straight, unsmiling gaze.

She was pretty, but there was the ice of sophistication in her eyes and lines of hard experience around her mouth.

"You poor boy!" she mocked. "Has some woman been mean to you?"

"Women don't interest me," he said.

"Which means, of course, that they do!" she laughed. "Tell me what has happened to you."

He shook his head.

What a difference there was in women! This one had lost her personality. He was as indifferent to her as he would have been to a man sitting opposite him. All he felt for her was a sort of contemptuous pity. His emotions were cold, dead. But if Ella had been sitting opposite him, he would have been tingling, breathless, confused, and abashed by her glances.

"I don't understand how a woman could be mean to you," she said.

He laughed grimly.

"Look here," he said gently, "don't do that. You can sit here and have as many drinks as you like. But I'm not interested."

She sat looking at him, sipping her drink.

"Your name is Brazo, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"I saw you whip Wilson," she went on. "You are a terrible fighter! It was about a woman, wasn't it?—Ella Wainright?"

Brazo did not answer.

"I know it was, of course," she said. "The whole camp knows it. Nearly everybody in camp heard that man Anderson telling Wilson how to apologize to her. But why didn't Anderson do her fighting? She likes him. She was with him nearly all the time you were away. He heard Wilson insult her, and yet they let you do the

fighting for fear Wilson would kill Anderson. You see, she can spare you but not Anderson."

Brazo did not answer, but the woman's words had inflamed him. He knew he couldn't accept the woman's words as positive proof that Anderson had been much in Ella's company during his absence, but he was certain Ella cared more for Anderson than she did for him.

Of course, he couldn't believe that Ella had wanted him to face Wilson, for she had not mentioned Wilson to him when he had returned. But why should she betray such temper at the mention, by him, of Anderson's name?

He left the table and went to a front window, where he stood for some time staring disgustedly into the street. He returned to the table and sat down again, ordering drinks. The liquor was served, and Brazo drank his while the woman smiled at him. She sipped hers and watched him.

"It was a kind of shabby way for her to treat you after what you did for her brother," said the woman. Her name, Brazo had discovered, was Millie. Twice the bartender had called her that.

"What do you know about it?" demanded Brazo.

"Why, everything, of course. Those things get out. I think Wilson told it in the first place. Anyway, the whole camp knows about it. You see, you can't discover gold in this country without people talking about you. They want to know, and they'll find out, some way."

Brazo was silent.

"Jim Henley must have trusted you," she went on. "I can understand that. But if Henley didn't leave any

directions and you should have died or got killed before Ella Wainright came, how would she know where to find the place where Henley made his strike?"

Brazo laughed into her eyes, which were now hard and bold.

"So that's it?" he said. "I've been wondering. You want to know where Henley made his strike! Well——"

He paused, for a wave of weakness and nausea swept over him, a great and overpowering lassitude. He got to his feet and stood, swaying back and forth, amazed and incredulous.

He saw the bartender coming toward him as if out of a haze. He caught a glimpse of the woman's face, smiling mockingly.

"Why, damn you," he said, "you've doped——"

He staggered, fell across the table.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN Brazo regained consciousness, he was in a bunk and lying flat on his back with all his clothes on. He was weak, dizzy, and had a terrific headache, which he tried to banish by rubbing his hands over his forehead.

The room was unfamiliar, and he stared around, trying to remember what had happened to him. When the recollection came, it brought a wry smile to his lips and a righteous rage into his heart.

They had drugged him. What they had in mind had been of course a hope that they might find something on his person which would direct them to the place where Jim Henley had found the gold. They hadn't found anything because there was nothing, but he sat up, swaying dizzily, and searched his pockets. One of them, the right pants pocket, had been turned inside out. The waistband of the pants had been slit in several places, and the lining of his vest had been ripped open. Even his hat, which was lying on the bunk, had been searched. They had not bothered to fold the sweat band back.

They hadn't betrayed much intelligence in thinking he would carry around with him anything that might reveal Jim Henley's secret, but, just the same, the incident indicated the depth of their eagerness, their greed, and their determination. They were becoming desperate in their search.

His personal belongings had not been taken. His money, his gun, his watch, and various other articles that he carried in his pockets were all where they belonged.

He got up, found some water in a pail, and drank a big dipperful. He walked to the front doorway and gazed out. The camp was active as ever, and he observed that the sun was almost directly overhead. They must have given him a powerful dose of the drug, for he had slept about twenty-four hours.

There was no indication that anyone had slept with him in the shack, for there was only one bunk, and he had been lying in that. The building was the one next door to the saloon, the doorway in which he was standing was the same in which Millie had stood when she had smiled at him. There was a back door, and they must have carried him into the shack through that, taking him out of the rear door of the saloon. There was only one room in the building. There was a cook stove in a corner with a layer of grease and soot on its top, a bench and a wash basin, the water pail and dipper standing on a table and dirty dishes and remnants of food. There was a roller towel on the wall above the bench, some pots and pans hanging here and there, and various female garments scattered around.

Brazo poured fresh water into the basin and washed his face and hands. His dizziness and weakness were wearing off, and the violent rage that had gripped him upon awakening had dulled until it had become derisive and ironic, with enough grim humour in it to steady him to a dangerous deliberation.

After washing, he went again to the front door and

stepped down into the street. He walked into the saloon in which he had had his experience with Millie, strode to the bar and grinned at the bartender, a man he had never seen before.

"I'm looking up some old friends," he said. The bartender was eyeing him with level gaze in which there was a hint of truculence, so Brazo added: "You ain't one of them."

"I don't remember to have seen you before," said the bartender.

"You're a liar," said Brazo gently, moving his right hand a little. "You're the jasper who was sitting at one of the tables in here yesterday when I was having my little talk with Millie. You ducked about the time I began to quit seeing. Do you remember me now?"

"Seems as if I do," answered the bartender. "As you say, I left before anything happened. What did happen?" The man's face had paled. He stood rigid. His gaze was furtive. But he was alone with Brazo.

"Nothing that you ain't accustomed to, I reckon," said Brazo, still gently. "Do you own this place?"

"I do."

"And the man who was here yesterday was working for you?"

The man nodded.

"I wonder if you could tell me where I could find him?" asked Brazo softly.

The man's pallor deepened. He cleared his throat.

"That's hard to say," he said. "He left camp last night, unexpectedly."

"And Millie?"

"Millie went with him."

"Unexpectedly, too, I reckon. Well, a lot of things happen that way, unexpectedly. You ain't thinking of leaving camp unexpectedly, eh?" said Brazo, meeting the man's gaze.

The man's face suddenly flooded with colour and became pale again.

"No," he said.

"Not before night, eh?" said Brazo. "Well, that's a good time. It will be better than staying here permanently."

"Look here!" blustered the man. "You can't pull that kind of a deal on me!"

"To-night," said Brazo.

He walked back of the bar, the man retreating before him until he could go no farther. He stood near a front window, staring with frightened eyes while Brazo took up a heavy Colt which was lying on a shelf under the bar, drew out the cartridges, and threw gun and cartridges out of an open side window. He did the same with a rifle that stood in a little recess behind the bar. Then he backed away from the man.

"So you won't get any fool notions," he said. He backed out of the front door, calling from there softly, "I'm visiting you about daylight," he said. "But if I was you I'd be hitting the breeze pretty regular about that time. So-long."

He backed across the street and vanished behind a tent. A little later, he was walking slowly toward the cabin and giving no attention to the amazed glances that followed him.

He had meant what he had said to the owner of the saloon, but he felt certain he would not have to shoot

the man. However, at daylight he would make good his word.

For the first time since the coming of Ella to the cabin, his thoughts were definite. He loved her, but he wasn't going to permit her to make a fool of him. He'd stay and take her part in the fight which was certain to result from the aggressions of people like Millie and her bartender friend, but he'd show her that he hadn't any expectations, and no regrets.

However, he did not go directly to the cabin, but paused at the stable door and leaned against it. At a little distance he saw several of the Wainright men washing their faces in front of the mess house. Anderson was not among them.

Brazo was hungry, and he expected that the noonday meal would be waiting for him on the table in the cabin. But he was reluctant to go in because he had a conviction that Ella had observed him smiling at Millie from the doorway of the saloon, yesterday. And if she had seen him, how was he to explain his overnight absence?

Women—especially Ella—had a way of jumping to amazingly accurate conclusions regarding the actions of men in whom they were interested. That interest need not necessarily be love. It might be hate, such as Ella had for him. Any interest at all would suffice to set their minds to working. He knew, for Ella had already given him many uncomfortable moments by seeming to know what was in his mind before he could express it. She had a way of leading him to admissions, and would smile at him in a way that informed him that she knew just what his answer would be.

Also, he had observed how married men permitted

themselves to be dictated to by their wives. When a man married, he appeared to lose his independence. There was no such a thing as a man being the head of a family. With a woman, there could be no evasion or equivocation. You couldn't fool them. You'd tell them a thing. All right. If what you told was the truth you were pretty safe. But if you evaded or lied, they were sure to catch a glint in your eyes which told them so. If the offense wasn't heinous, they'd smile in a superior sort of way and let you go on for the present. But months afterward, when you'd forgotten the incident, they would casually mention that they had known all along that you had been lying. H'm. Hadn't he watched Hellman and his wife? And other men and their wives? And he had been amused. He wasn't amused now. Ella had the same penetrating intelligence. The worst of it was that a man might be telling the truth. But because he knew he would not be believed he would act like a liar.

Well, what he had done with his time was his business. He wasn't married to Ella, and if she asked for explanations he'd tell her so. But when, still standing at the stable door, he saw her emerge from the cabin and walk toward him, he stiffened and flushed.

When she neared him, he looked up, intending to greet her with a serene casualness, but to his amazement she walked straight past him without looking at him.

He knew she had seen him. He could tell that her action in completely ignoring him was intended as a disciplinary measure.

He smiled in huge contempt. But he watched her as she walked to the mess house and stood for a few

minutes talking with two of the men. Then she turned and started back toward the cabin. This time he would not give her an opportunity to cut him, so he bowed his head and pretended to be interested in his belt buckle. Then, suddenly, he became aware that she was standing before him.

He looked up, met her gaze, but instantly dropped it again to the belt buckle. Her eyes held depths of scorn that awed him.

"I suppose I ought to thank you for defending me against Wolf Wilson," she said. Her voice was low, but there was a sting of indifference in it, a hint of contempt, perhaps. Whatever it was, it aroused him to a saturnine mood. He looked straight at her and was conscious of a savage pleasure that suddenly filled him. She didn't like him, and now, without fear of losing anything more, he could reply to her impertinences.

"Don't do it if it's going to hurt you any," he said.

"It certainly hurts no one to be civil," she retorted.

"I'm not asking for any lessons, ma'am," he said, deliberately smiling at her.

The smile seemed to anger her, for her eyes flashed.

"You are acting like this to annoy me, of course. You think you are repaying me for what I said to you yesterday!"

"For to-day, ma'am," he said. "Just a minute ago you passed me and pretended you didn't see me. I reckon you had some idea that you were punishing me for something."

"Have you done something to deserve punishment?" she asked quickly.

By the way she narrowed her eyes at him when she

asked the question, he knew she had seen him smiling at Millie.

However, it pleased him to pretend ignorance of her knowledge.

"Were you thinking I'd done something?" he asked, a challenge in his voice.

"Whatever you did is your affair," she told him. "I have no doubt that you did it because you wanted to do it, and if that is the case, there is no more to be said. I just wanted you to know that I saw you!"

"So you saw me," he said, drawling, still pretending to be ignorant of her meaning. "Maybe you'd tell me what you saw me doing?" he added.

"Don't try to pretend, Brazo!" she said. "You make a terrible failure of it! You know as well as I do that you were standing in the door of that saloon flirting with that woman!"

He laughed, his pulses leaping with elation. She was jealous.

"So, you saw that?" he said. "Well, it was the other way 'round, ma'am. She was trying to flirt with me."

"Don't lie, Brazo. I saw you. And I saw her go into the saloon through the rear door. Oh, I don't care!" she went on coldly. "What you do is nothing to me. Only—only please don't try to lie to me, Brazo. I detest a liar!"

Her straight, angry gaze made Brazo uncomfortable. Whether she liked him or not, he didn't want her to get the impression that he could be attracted to women of the Millie type. Also, he suspected that Ella had seen him this noon emerging from the woman's dwelling. He had used the front door in leaving, and Ella must

certainly have seen him if she had been looking in that direction and was interested. But he knew he had smiled at Millie and that Ella had been watching him. No matter what he told her now, she would not believe him.

He would make no explanations. Concede that he had smiled at Millie. Hadn't he seen her smile at Anderson? He had asked her for no explanations, even though he had many times thought of doing so. And he suspected that she had known all along that her smiles at Anderson annoyed him.

"If you don't care, why are you telling me you saw me flirting with that woman?" he asked, his smile grimly mocking.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "So you admit it?"

"Well," he said calmly, "is there any difference between me flirting with her and her flirting with me?"

"Of course not!"

"There's a heap of difference. Suppose you flirted with a man—say, Anderson."

She drew herself erect and answered frigidly:

"I have never flirted with Anderson!"

Brazo was filled with a deep satisfaction over her denial, but he remembered certain of her smiles at his rival and drawled an irritating:

"No—o?"

Now again he observed that her eyes were cold with contemptuous disdain, the emotion which had been in them yesterday when she had threatened to slap his face. It was curious that every time he mentioned Anderson her eyes took on that expression.

"No!" she said furiously, stamping a foot and clench-

ing her hands. "I tell you I have never flirted with Anderson! No! No! No! I will not have you thinking that! I—I hate you, Brazo. I hate you! Oh, how I hate you!"

"Well," he said, awed by the depth of her emotion, "I've known that quite a long while."

She looked at him steadily for a moment, as though to fix his expression definitely in her mind. Then she turned and walked to the cabin, while Brazo, more puzzled than ever over the apparent vagaries of her emotions, stalked to the mess house to eat with the men.

There he was met with expressions of admiration for his conduct in his fight with Wilson. But he talked little, and the congratulations of the men seemed to depress him. He sat for a long time thinking of a sentiment expressed by Hardin:

"You're sure *all man,* Brazo!"

Maybe he was. He had never thought much about that, for he knew of only one way to deal with men, because he knew their thoughts as his own. But women were different. He knew nothing of their mental processes, of their moods, of their conceptions of morality or fair dealing. He merely knew that with one woman he had failed. He was not "all man" to her, and he knew he never would be.

CHAPTER XXVI

OF COURSE, since Ella hated him, Brazo could not conscientiously continue to occupy the cabin. So, during the afternoon, when he was certain she was not in the cabin, he went there, gathered his belongings, and carried them to the bunk house.

At last he was an outsider in her affairs. He had never held any sort of a position with her. He was not an employee, like Hardin or Anderson or any of the other men, and of course he never would be. The bank book which held a record of the deposit she had made in his name for his share of the money received for the gold he had left in the cabin. From the first he had been resolved not to accept it.

He had been deliberate in his decision to quit the cabin. For a long time he had considered the situation, and of late he had begun to wonder if he was not doing the girl an injustice by sharing the cabin with her, thus creating talk that would not do her reputation any good. As long as there had been no town near, their joint occupancy had made little difference; in fact, conditions had made the situation inevitable. But that tongues had been wagging was proved by Wilson's insult, and he had no doubt that others were secretly making a scandal out of the affair.

He himself had not thought of evil. His love for Ella

was reverential, worshipful, an ecstatic passion that exalted him. Conversely, the wrecking of his love had thrown him into dejection.

He gave no explanation to the other men about his coming to the bunk house. And they asked no questions, for there was something in his manner that warned them.

He had no occupation now, and time was a wearisome space in which nothing happened. He avoided Ella and Anderson. He would not ride with the outfit because to do so would indicate that he had voluntarily sacrificed his independence. Nor would he ask Ella to hire him to work for her, for that would mean the humbling of his pride. Yet he would not leave because he knew that there would come a day when Ella would need him.

He was not misled by Wilson's departure. Wilson would return, for he was not the type of man to give up easily. He would come again, with his men. And then Ella would have need of him.

So, aimlessly, he lingered. He spent much time exploring the cliff dwelling, climbing the ladders that reached from terrace to terrace, creeping through narrow passages, meditating upon the sort of lives the Indians had lived before the white men had come to disturb them. Their city made a startling contrast to the city the white men had built in the basin.

As the days passed, he began to feel that presently the white man's city would also be deserted. One by one, he observed, the inhabitants were leaving. The amount of gold that had been found had not been sufficient to satiate their greed, and gold alone would hold them.

The saloon keeper that Brazo had warned was gone

the next morning when Brazo called. Brazo learned that he had attempted to sell the place but had found no buyer. So he had packed his goods and quietly vanished, leaving no word regarding his destination. He had left his building and his bar ready for business; but no one reopened the place because there was no prospect of profit. The new town of Wainright was slowly dying.

Brazo watched it die. With savage satisfaction, he observed that day by day the number of departing citizens increased. The town had been conceived in greed and was dying of disgust. Some of the disgruntled residents did not even bother to take their tents with them upon their pilgrimage to the outside world. There could be no profit in tearing down a frame building and freighting its remains out into the desert, and so all the frame buildings remained.

The stage had stopped visiting the town, for word of the failure had gone to the outside world, and there were none who were interested in Wainright. The town, as a certain man had predicted early in its career, was a "bloomer."

Some desert men, wanderers who in the idiomatic phraseology of the time were termed "rats," still lingered along the river and in the hills. They would stay as long as they found traces of "colour," or until their nomadic impulses moved them to adventure in other sections.

But the vitality had gone from the town, leaving the husks that had housed it. Once more the primeval wilderness reigned. The clatter and the turmoil were succeeded by silence, which had receded to hover and wait until man should admit defeat. The encompassing

desolation mocked man's efforts and stole back again to peer into his deserted buildings.

Jack Brinn remained. He occupied a small frame shanty on a level near the river, and he appeared to have no occupation. He did no prospecting, and most of his time was spent in walking in evident aimlessness into the hills and along the river. Often Brazo observed him hanging around the new ranch house—where Ella had gone to live—talking with the girl.

A new stable had been erected, new corrals built. After the exodus, the wire fence across the basin had been removed and used to span the westerly end of the range, to keep the cattle from roaming into the timber in that direction.

The men who had erected the buildings and the corral had gone, and there remained only the five cowboys Ella had hired, together with Anderson and Hardin and the cook.

Brazo still took his meals with the men, but he had moved his effects to the cabin after Ella vacated it, and he slept there.

Nobody bothered him. So far as he knew, Ella did not revisit the place. If she knew he was in the vicinity, she kept her knowledge hidden. When he saw her at all, it was from a distance, and always she carried herself with an unconcerned air that made him miserable. If she had betrayed regret, if he could have perceived evidence of mental distress in her, he might still have hope. But her indifference could mean only one thing.

He felt useless, superfluous, and his moods were sullen and vicious. He got a little satisfaction out of the knowledge that Ella did not talk with Anderson as much as

she had been in the habit of doing. She did not ride with him; and he observed that in her presence Anderson was formally polite. And Anderson did not stay in the ranch house with her, but with the men in the bunk house. Therefore she was considering him merely as a sort of foreman, not even a permanent foreman, or she would have given him the cabin. Perhaps she thought the cabin belonged to Brazo by virtue of his long occupancy of it. Anyway, the fact that she did not give it to Anderson indicated that she knew Brazo was living in it.

Brazo was still puzzled about Brinn. He had seen Brinn before he had met him in Wainright on the day he had had his beard shaved off, or he knew someone who strongly resembled the man. He couldn't remember the name of the man he thought Brinn resembled, nor could he remember ever having met Brinn. Knowledge of Brinn was lying somewhere in his recollection, but he couldn't summon it. It eluded him. It was vague, but just convincing enough to annoy him.

He often stood at a distance and watched Brinn, who had a habit of sitting for hours on a bench in front of his shack, smoking. He had looked at Brinn from all angles, and though the man's face haunted him, he could not identify it.

He grew to dislike the man. From the first he had felt a distinct hostility, but Brinn had treated him with respect and a certain quiet deference, even while appearing to avoid him, and his hostility had died from having nothing to nourish it.

However, his dislike had grown, perhaps because of Brinn's visits to the ranch house. For there was some-

thing in Brinn's manner while in Ella's presence which should not in Brazo's opinion have been there. An assurance, a confidence. If there had been familiarity, Brazo would have clashed with the man, but since he did nothing more than visit Ella, Brazo could not justifiably interfere.

However, in talking with Brinn one day, he intimated that Brinn's presence in camp annoyed him. He spoke plainly:

"There don't seem to be anything keeping you here," he said.

"It's quiet," answered Brinn. "Gives a man a chance to think."

"When was you thinking you needed to do any?" said Brazo.

There was an edge of truculence in Brazo's voice. His dislike of the man increased because the latter was obviously not telling his real reason for staying in the deserted camp. Brazo hoped he would resent the questions.

But Brinn merely smiled.

"It's a fact that a man don't need to think," he said. "Most men don't. What I meant was that it's quiet here an' I like it."

"Meaning you intend to stay?"

"Well, not long." Brinn was sitting on the bench in front of his shack. He now looked up and smiled into Brazo's eyes. He seemed to divine what Brazo intended him to understand, and was intimating that he was not going to take offense.

Brazo could not force a fight upon a man who did not want to fight. But something else was bothering him.

"You know Ella Wainright long?" he asked.

"Well, not long, I expect. But I know her."

"Friend of yours?"

"In a way."

"What way?"

"We like to talk."

Brinn looked up at Brazo again, and for an instant Brazo had a conviction that Brinn had looked at him like that once before. But again his mental pictures were indefinite, formless. Yet he felt that one day his senses would grasp the hazy outline and bring it clearly before him. Now it was like a name that trembles upon the tip of the tongue but cannot be spoken.

To assist his memory he said:

"I reckon I've seen you before—before you came to Wainright."

Brinn shook his head.

"I don't remember seein' you before. If I had seen you, I'd have remembered."

"You was looking at me pretty strong that day I came out of the barber shop," said Brazo.

"H'm. Yes. You was lookin' pretty strong at me. Thought mebbe you knowed me an' was goin' to speak to me. Queer how things like that happen, ain't it?"

Brazo did not answer, but turned and walked away. However, he still felt that he would one day remember where he had seen Brinn. And he was certain that Brinn had not been a friend.

CHAPTER XXVII

BRINN continued his visits to the ranch house, and several times Brazo saw him and Ella sitting on the porch, talking. From the distance at which Brazo watched them, it appeared their conversations were important, if not serious. For Brinn's gestures were at times vehement, and Brazo was certain that he had seen Ella betray indignation. His dislike of Brinn grew, but he told himself that he could not interfere. Brinn had told him that he and Ella were friends, and the fact that she permitted the man to visit her seemed to vindicate his statement. Twice within a month, and each time following a visit to the ranch house, Brinn mounted his horse and rode away. He rode southward, toward Cooney, and both times he was absent for several days. Returning, he appeared pleased about something.

Once, during Brinn's absence, Brazo had accidentally met Ella. He had been riding Blinky into the eastern hills, to determine how many prospectors still remained in the vicinity, and he met Ella riding toward him along a narrow trail between two hills. There was no way to avoid the meeting.

Riding slowly toward her, he observed that she flushed and drew her horse down. And as he came closer, she pulled the animal to a halt and sat rigid in the saddle, as if inviting Brazo to speak, to linger.

Brazo grinned wryly at her. Men had hated him and he had known how to deal with them, but now a woman hated him and he had no precedent to govern his manner toward her. If he could have reciprocated her hatred, he would have known exactly what to do. But he loved her, and when he halted Blinky at her apparent silent command, he was embarrassed to the point of complete mental paralysis. He could not have spoken a word—the first word. He could not even meet her gaze. He sat limply, absently stroking Blinky's mane, looking at the pommel of his saddle, where the leather had been scuffed, revealing the iron.

"Where are you going, Brazo?" asked Ella.

It seemed to him that her voice had a note of alarm in it. But he could not be sure, because he did not know why she should be alarmed over having accidentally met him. She ought to know him better than that.

"Just riding," he answered.

"Oh," she said.

There followed a silence during which Brazo's mind began to function again. Courageously he raised his head and looked at her. She was sitting very erect, looking straight at him. His courage left him, his gaze went down again.

"Do you know that the ranch house is finished, Brazo?" she asked. Her voice was now severe and distinct.

"I've noticed that."

"Oh, you have!"

He nodded, knowing she was reproving him for his lack of interest. But how could a man visit a girl who hated him? If he had been a hypocrite, he would have

visited the ranch house long ago, to pretend an interest he did not feel. But he wasn't interested in the ranch house. It was nothing to him and never would be.

"Then why haven't you come to see it?" she asked.

Didn't she know why? She should know. What did women think men were, anyway? Had she forgotten that she had told him she hated him? Had she expected that a declaration of hatred would bring him to her? He looked up at her now, his gaze saturnine.

"I've been busy," he said.

"Oh, you have?" Her laugh was gently derisive. There was something else in it, too. Not wistfulness. Certainly not that. But something. Something she tried to repress.

"So you have been busy," she said when he did not answer. "What have you been doing?"

He was miserably uncomfortable. He couldn't tell her that he had been doing nothing. He didn't know what to tell her. For she knew what he had been doing. The mockery in her voice told him that.

"Just sitting around, waiting," he answered.

"For what, Brazo?"

He did not want to tell her. She would be frightened if he told her that he expected Wilson to return. So he did not answer.

"You are not waiting for Millie, are you?" she said coldly.

"Millie!" he said, startled into meeting her gaze. "How——"

He paused, reddened, dropped his gaze from hers.

She laughed, a trace of scorn in her voice. "How did I happen to discover her name? I didn't inquire, Brazo,

you may be certain of that, because—because I was not interested. Someone told me, voluntarily. Somebody who saw you with her in the saloon and saw you coming out of her house the next day."

"Who was that?" he questioned, inwardly raging at the meddler.

"Oh, a friend of mine."

Brinn had told her, he decided. Brinn was the only friend she had here. Anderson, Hardin, and the other cowboys would not tell her a thing like that. They were too manly to carry tales. But Brinn! He grimly decided to square things with Brinn as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Ella was watching him, and smiling faintly with a cold aloofness which was meant, no doubt, to show him that she had little interest in his activities and that she had mentioned Millie merely to indicate that she was aware of his sins, and that he was wasting time in trying to fool her.

"So you did come out of there, didn't you?" she said, when Brazo did not answer.

"Yes."

She caught her breath, stiffened.

"Where was Millie?" she asked.

"She'd pulled her freight."

"She had gone? Why?"

"I reckon she was afraid. They'd drugged me. In the saloon. Millie and the bartender."

"Do you mean they drugged you in the saloon and carried you into Millie's house?" she asked, keenly curious.

"That's it. I don't know when it happened. When I came to, Millie and the bartender had lit out. I told the

owner to leave town. They were trying to find something on me which would tell them where they'd find where Jim had got his gold. Maybe your friend told you that, too!"

He looked at her now, to see that her face suffused with colour.

Brinn had not told her. She had seen Brazo smile at Millie, had seen him emerge from the door of the woman's house, and had formed her own conclusions. Not until this minute had she realized that she had misjudged Brazo, and the conviction had filled her with regret and embarrassment. She did not want Brazo to see and interpret her blushes, so she spurred her horse past him and left him to stare after her.

Brazo finished his ride. Not until late in the afternoon did he return to the cabin.

He meant to punish Brinn for his meddling. Just what form the punishment would take, he did not know. Brinn's manner when charged with the deed would decide him. He thought banishment would be enough, for it seemed Brinn liked the camp.

Brazo stabled his horse, carried saddle and bridle to their pegs, and strode through the camp. He went to Brinn's shack and found it empty. He sat on the bench in front of the shack for some time, then got up and walked through the deserted streets, peering into doorways and windows.

Brinn had not returned.

At length Brazo found himself standing in front of the saloon in which he had been drugged. He entered, seated himself in a chair at one of the tables, and sat there for a long time, waiting. He got up after a while

and went to the bar, where he stood, his elbows resting on the crude plank top, his chin in his cupped hands, frowning. He was facing west. At his right was the open rear door, at his left the front door. The sun was going down over the distant mountain peaks, and the streets and buildings of the deserted camp were submerged in the first faint shadows of the evening. A cool breeze came through the front door and passed out of the rear door and the open windows in the wall behind Brazo.

Brazo's thoughts were upon Ella. He had not glanced at her often during the time they had been talking together on the trail, but the glances he had given her had been keen and probing. He could never tell what her thoughts were, of course, and every time he met her gaze he became unaccountably embarrassed. Yet, during their talk, he had got a distinct impression that something was worrying her. Her eyes had held a gleam of anxiety.

What could be worrying her?

He gave it up. She had never taken him into her confidence. Not once that he could remember. From the first she had kept her thoughts to herself. Or she had chosen to confide in Anderson, as she had when they had arranged that first trip to Cooney, when they had taken the first bags of gold over and he had stayed at home and got her suitcase.

After that he had been out of it. Anderson had been closer to her than he. He had been a mere spectator except when he had deliberately forced himself into her affairs, as when he had chased Wilson out of camp.

He shook his head and smiled with some bitterness.

Well, he was like a blind man groping around in the dark, but if it was Brinn she was worrying about, she wouldn't have to worry about him much longer. Only until he could see Brinn.

He turned slowly around and leaned his back against the bar. His elbows were upon it, and when he saw a man standing in the rear door silently watching him, and another in the front door engaged in the same sinister occupation, he knew that for the present his elbows would have to remain where they were.

The men had evidently been watching him for some time. Both were as sinister as the silence that filled the saloon. They were not friendly, or they would have spoken to him the instant he turned. Their silence was a menace, plain and unmistakable. They were here to kill him, and the instant he moved their guns would be out, roaring.

He knew that, as he knew that killing men was their occupation. They were professional gunmen. As a type, they were not new to him. He had seen their kind in many towns and camps and he was aware that, finding him absorbed in thought, they had deliberately chosen their positions, knowing the strategical importance of getting a probable enemy between them.

The man at the rear door was smiling maliciously. He wore two guns and his thumbs were hooked suggestively in his cartridge belt above the butts of the weapons. His hat was pulled well down over his eyes, which were agleam with a strange lust. He was enjoying Brazo's helplessness.

The other man's mouth was crooked in a sneer. His

eyes were steady, merciless. He was eager, for his right hand was poised above the stock of the gun at his right hip, and the fingers were twitching.

The men did not speak, but stood there silently watching. They were obviously waiting for Brazo to move, and Brazo knew that the movement they were watching for would need to be only a slight one for their purpose. He had only to lift a hand, or shift his position in the slightest manner, and they would shoot.

Brazo did not make that movement. He merely turned his head from left to right and looked at them. And he smiled derisively at the man in the rear door.

"Friends of Wolf Wilson, eh?" he said.

"What the hell's that to you?" snarled the man.

"Nothing, I reckon," answered Brazo. "Did you come here to buy this place? If you did, you're too late. The bottom has dropped out of this camp."

The man's malicious smile vanished. He appeared to look more keenly at Brazo, as if wondering at the latter's entire absence of fear. He knew that Brazo was aware of their intentions, for his absolute immobility told him that.

"Anybody hiding behind that bar?" he snapped, stiffening. "You look, Bill!" he ordered.

The man at the front door moved forward, leaned over the bar and peered behind it. He stepped back and shook his head at his friend.

Brazo had not moved a finger. These men had come to kill him, but he was convinced that they could not do it at once. There would have to be some provocation, no matter how slight, to nerve them to the deed. They were now trying, perhaps unconsciously, to work

themselves into an artificial rage, and they would seize upon any pretext to arouse such a rage. Sooner or later, that rage would flame, but Brazo was certain that as long as he did not move they would delay. Meanwhile, if they relaxed their vigilance only for one flashing instant, he would draw.

But they stood, watching him, trying to fan the spark of foul purpose in their hearts to flaming action.

"You're Brazo, eh?" said the man at the front door. "You've got a bad reputation. I'd like to see you fan your gun. Step away from that bar an' show some of the man in you!"

"If he was a man he'd have moved before now," jeered the other. "He's plain yellow, I reckon. Move out there as Bill tells you!"

Brazo smiled. "Your gun would be jumping into your hand," he said; "you couldn't stop it, you being so used to slinging it on men that ain't looking at you."

The man's face reddened with an incipient rage. But he winked at Bill, slyly.

"Haw, haw!" he laughed. "'He's long on palaver, Bill."

"Hell, bore him, King!" said Bill. "I wouldn't let no man say I wanted to shoot him in the back!"

Both men were now tense. At any instant the impulse to draw and shoot might seize them. And then, between two fires, Brazo would be riddled. He would perhaps be able to get in one shot, or two, but his own death would be inevitable. Yet he had no intention of going out without a fight. His muscles tensed, he grinned his defiance.

With his muscles twitching on the verge of action, he

heard a cold, clear voice coming in one of the side windows. Brinn's voice.

"Don't anybody do any movin', gents!" ordered Brinn. "I'm aimin' to do a little killin' myself if this thing comes to a show-down!"

A double-barrelled shotgun was in Brinn's hands. Brinn's shoulders were slightly above the window sill and his elbows were resting on the sill in such a position that he could quickly pivot in either direction. His fingers were on the triggers and his cheek was against the stock of the weapon. His eyes were bright and alert.

Had Brinn appeared in the window with a revolver, perhaps Bill and King would have acted. But the shotgun at close quarters is infinitely more deadly than the revolver. It seemed that Bill and King were aware of that fact, for both began to raise their hands.

Brazo left the bar. Acting upon Brinn's suggestion, he plucked the guns from the killers' holsters and forced the men themselves outside into the deepening twilight. The men stood, sullen and silent, as Brinn came around a corner of the saloon, the shotgun in hand.

Brinn grinned at Brazo.

"Their horses are in the timber," he said. "I was nosin' around in there an' I saw them comin'. Soon as I seen them sneakin' around, I knowed they was up to some mischief, so I got my scatter-gun—which don't scatter so much when you're shootin' close with her. Seems them boys knowed that, eh? Well, I'm for blowin' hell out of them! You want to do it?" He offered the shotgun to Brazo, who grinned at him and shook his head.

"I ain't bloodthirsty," declared Brinn. "But when

guys come around like this, aimin' to pulverize a man between them, I sort of like to give them what's comin' to them. Chase them over into the timber an' I'll blow them apart!"

The four went into the timber and stopped when they neared two horses which were tied near a deadfall. Brinn still held the shotgun, and now he faced the two killers, the muzzle of the gun pointing at them.

"You two jaspers step back a bit!" he ordered.

Brinn's eyes were blazing malevolently. He meant to kill the men.

Bill and King were trembling, for they knew that death in a peculiarly revolting form was imminent. They swayed backward, their hands raised, their faces ashen.

"Come a-huntin' for my friend, eh?" said Brinn, grinning sardonically. "You'd have plugged him without givin' him a chance, eh? Sneakin' up on him! Gettin' him between you! Standin' there like a couple of turkey buzzards, waitin'! Enjoyin' him! Why, damn your hides, I'll show you somethin'! I'll blow you apart!"

Brinn appeared to have lost control of himself. His primitive impulses were rampant. All along Brazo had considered him a mild-mannered man, quiet and secretive. But now his passions were rioting. The change in him was amazing.

Brazo decided to prevent this horror. He stepped toward Brinn and placed a hand on the short man's shoulder.

"Look here, Brinn," he said, "you can't do that. It's murder!"

Brinn turned and looked up at Brazo. The short man's

eyes were brilliant with the malignance of his passion.

"Who's goin' to stop me?" demanded Brinn.

His gaze held Brazo's. And now, suddenly, Brazo remembered. The glare in Brinn's eyes had revived a forgotten mental picture, had recreated a vivid scene from the past.The light that glowed in Brinn's eyes at this minute was the same which had shown in the eyes of the short man who, raising himself upon an elbow at Bain's Camp, had accused him of murdering the army paymaster!

Brazo smiled with a grimness that sobered Brinn.

"I couldn't remember until now," said Brazo. "So you got over it? And I thought sure you'd die!"

The short man sneered.

"Well, what are you goin' to do about it?" he said.

"Nothing, I reckon. You've sort of squared things by keeping these fellows from killing me. But you're not going to murder them."

He grasped the shotgun by the breechblock, running a forefinger under the cocked hammers so that they could not strike the firing pins. He drew the weapon from Brinn's unresisting hands and faced Bill and King.

"Get on your horses and slope!" he ordered."When you get fifty yards away I'm going to cut down on you!"

He stood, the shotgun poised, as the men ran to their horses.

Behind him Brinn raged.

"Make it twenty-five yards!" he yelled. "Salivate them!"

The men were in the saddles, and the horses were running. Brazo lifted the shotgun to his shoulder, aware that behind him Brinn was yelling for him to shoot.

The men passed the twenty-five yard mark and the shotgun did not go off. They were racing headlong, crouching over the necks of their horses when they had gone approximately fifty yards. Still the shotgun did not go off. Quickly the men rode out of range, and Brazo lowered the gun and turned to Brinn, who was expressing his disgust with startling obscenities.

"Why didn't you shoot them! Why didn't you shoot them!" he reiterated over and over, as though his brain was unable to grasp the appalling fact that Brazo had permitted the men to get away unpunished.

"Shucks, Brinn," said Brazo, "I was scared of hitting the horses."

"Aw, hell!" jeered Brinn. "Their horses! Why, you damned fool! Do you see what I see? Well, look! There's a dozen more of them guys hiding behind that butte that sticks out from the big cliff down the river. Wilson's men, likely. An' you've let two of them get away!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

KING and Bill rode through the timber in zigzag fashion, apparently anticipating that Brinn or Brazo would resort to shooting at them with their six-shooters. But, as they drew away, they grew less concerned for their safety and at last halted their horses and waved their hands derisively at their enemies.

Brazo was calm but Brinn raged.

"You're a soft-headed sucker!" he charged Brazo. "If you was too chicken-hearted to shoot, why did you take the gun away from me? We had them! Now we've got to do it all over again! Don't you know that Wilson's determined to find out where Jim Henley's gold came from? There's a dozen men in that gang he's got with him, an' they mean business!"

Brazo gave Brinn the shotgun.

The short man amused him. He had an explosive temper, and the primitive lusts were boiling in him. Yet there was something likeable in him. His black eyes were bright, and they perpetually held an inquiring gleam. He smiled easily, with a certain secrecy which gave the lie to his questioning eyes. Brazo had disliked him because he had seemed to be too friendly with Ella, but now Brinn had served him well and he was revising his judgment.

"Soft, eh?" said Brazo. "Well, who was soft when King and Bill were about to make things interesting for me?"

Brinn grimaced.

"H'm," he said.

"Why didn't you do your shooting then?" asked Brazo.

"H'm." Brinn flashed a look at Brazo. "Them jaspers is too dangerous to monkey with. One of them would have plugged me while I was shootin' the other."

"Then you wasn't expecting to have any help," jeered Brazo.

"Not any. I play my own game."

"You knew me right away," said Brazo. "When I came out of the barber shop."

Brinn grinned, nodded.

"You didn't know me, though," he said. "I could see you was puzzled. When did you get to knowin' me?"

"When I looked at you just before I took the shotgun away, I saw you sitting on the ground at Bain's Camp accusing me of killing the paymaster."

Brinn chuckled. "That was quick thinkin'!" he said. "You was flabbergasted. For a minute you didn't know what to do. I was hit hard, but I enjoyed you. But you got away slick. When I saw you comin' out of the barber shop, I knowed you wouldn't recognize me. I had a narrow squeak. I pulled out, but I lost a lot of beef, an' I've never been right well since. In the hospital over at Deming six months."

"Your friend died, eh?"

Brinn nodded.

"You got him plumb centre," he said.

"What are you hanging around here for, Brinn?" asked Brazo.

Brinn's eyes grew truculent.

"This is a free country, ain't it?" he said. "I ain't botherin' about your personal affairs. It's none of your business what I'm here for. An' I reckon if the sheriff knowed what I know you wouldn't be hangin' around here either!"

Brazo moved, and his heavy Colt was lying in his hand, its muzzle against the short man's stomach. Brinn had saved his life but he had also jeopardized it when he had accused him at Bain's Camp, and Brinn's manner had enraged him.

"You're doing the talking, Brinn!" he said. "You've followed me here. What have you been waiting for? Why don't you tell the sheriff instead of hanging around here?"

Brinn's eyes were alight with mockery. He laughed.

"Sho! So you want a showdown, eh? Well, use your brain. If I was intendin' to peach on you, I'd have done it before now, I reckon. I'm off clean, ain't I? I know Ella Wainright has got a hitch on you that you can't break, don't I? Well, I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you nor her. An' there ain't no evidence ag'in' you unless I want to spring it. Bain's dead. He was killed by a man he had an argument with. In his store. The stableman's cashed in. He run into a rovin' band of Apaches not more than a month after the paymaster was killed. There was another man there, too, but he was killed with the stableman. There ain't no more evidence ag'in' you but me, an' I ain't goin' back there an' run chances of them takin' your word over mine. It don't look

reasonable, does it? If I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you, you hadn't ought to have nothin' ag'in' me. But if you want to let your gun off an' destroy the evidence, you can let her go an' be damned to you!"

Brinn's eyes were blazing with earnestness, but there was still a glint of secrecy in them.

"Why did you keep King and Bill from shooting me?" asked Brazo. "I never did anything to you except to kill your partner."

"Shucks," said Brinn, smiling faintly. "I'm Ella Wainright's friend, ain't I? Don't I know she wouldn't like to have you killed?"

Brazo felt it was useless to press his inquiries. Once, previously, he had spoken to Brinn about his friendship with Ella, and when he had returned from the trip to Deming he had mentioned Brinn to Ella, only to have her make what to him had seemed an evasive reply. Her friendship with Brinn was not his affair. And to-day Brinn had saved his life.

He holstered his gun.

Brinn was paying no attention to him but was gazing toward the butte where he had seen the riders he had mentioned. He was squinting against the growing darkness, and his body was rigid.

"We've got to sneak out of sight," he said. "Them devils are up to some mischief! They're spreadin', scatterin'! We'd better pull our freight!'

Although the darkness was settling heavily, Brazo could see several horsemen darting here and there in the timber. That meant they were moving to surround Brinn and himself, and so he and Brinn began to run toward the buildings of the camp. They kept in the

timber as long as possible, and then ran crouching along the base of a ridge near the river until they were able to dodge behind a group of tents and shanties. Once among the tents they ceased running.

They stopped in front of one of the shacks, which was Brinn's, and Brinn entered, to emerge with a rifle, a saddle, bridle, and some clothing.

"I'm movin'," he said. "I've got an idea that livin' in this shack is unhealthy."

Brazo could not see his face, but he caught the grimness in Brinn's laugh.

They went to Brazo's cabin, and Brinn entered, threw his belongings in a corner, and retained only the rifle. He stood for an instant in the doorway beside Brazo.

There were no signs of the riders they had seen, and no sound came from the timber.

"Any of the boys around?" asked Brinn.

"They rode east this morning to throw the stock on to a new range. I reckon they won't be back for a few days."

"Hell!" disgustedly exclaimed Brinn. "She nurses them cattle too much. She's got some fool idea that because they're Herefords she's got to pamper them! Mebbe before mornin' she'll wish she'd kept some of the boys here!"

Brazo stared into the darkness without replying. Meanwhile, Brinn continued to talk. He smelled trouble. Wilson's men were wolves, just like Wilson. They'd find out where Jim Henley got that gold if they had to stake Ella Wainright out somewhere and torture her. Hadn't they got Kuneen to impersonate the deputy commissioner? And wasn't the real Kuneen in Washing-

ton, with his chief? The fellow who had impersonated Kuneen was Wilson's friend, a gambler from Tucson. Peaceable methods had failed, and now they would try something else.

"That somethin' will be to get hold of Ella Wainright!" declared Brinn. "They'll work like Indians!"

Brazo stepped outside the cabin. The darkness was now impenetrable, and no sound disturbed the solemn stillness of the basin. There was even a lull in the night song of the forest denizens. The silence meant, of course, that Wilson's men were hovering about.

There was a light in one of the rooms of the ranch house. Ella was alone there and unaware of the danger that menaced her. Brazo moved back to the cabin, entered, filled his pockets with cartridges, took his rifle from its pegs, and joined Brinn at the door.

"They'll need some surprising," he said. "They'll not expect to find us at the house."

"That's right," said Brinn. "But you go first. I'll hang around outside. Mebbe some of them will come nosin' around here. There'll be a moon after a while, an' if I see any of them sneakin' around the house, I'll hoot once, like an owl. If I can't get a bead on them, that is. I ain't throwin' no chances away!"

Brazo vanished into the darkness toward the house, and Brinn moved away from the cabin and was swallowed by the dense blackness.

Brazo approached the ranch house by making a wide half circle to avoid the light that shone out of the windows. He had never been inside the house, but he had made a mental note of the location of the rooms, and he decided that the light was in the kitchen. The

front of the house was dark, so he stepped softly upon the veranda, crossed it, found the door, and tried the latch.

The door was not barred. He opened it, entered cautiously, and closed it behind him, barred it. He was in a big front room, but the darkness was as deep in here as it was outside except for a weak beam that came through a doorway quite a distance from where he stood. He decided that there was another room between the front room and the door through which the light came. That room would be the dining room, if the interior of the house had been planned as he had anticipated from his outside observations.

He was aware that any accidental noise he might make would frighten the girl, and if he tried to walk through the rooms in the darkness he was certain to stumble against something. The door leading into the kitchen was open, but the light was evidently in one of the corners of the room, near the stove, probably, and only a faint streak entered the dining room, to illuminate dimly a section of the western wall and to make a small yellow patch on the floor.

He did not move from the front door, but called softly.

He heard her walking across the floor of the kitchen. Her steps must have drowned his voice, for she continued to walk. He called her name again, and this time she stopped. Again he called. He heard her walk across the floor, and then she was standing in the doorway with the light at her back, peering into the darkness toward him.

"Is somebody there?" she asked.

"It's Brazo," he answered.

He heard her gasp. She appeared to grow suddenly taller.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "So it's you!"

In her hands was something. A cooking utensil, he supposed. She dropped it. It clattered metallically upon the floor and rolled into a patch of light, and Brazo observed that it was a large spoon.

"Oh!" she exclaimed again, "how awkward!" She stooped and picked up the spoon. "I'm getting supper," she added. "If you will excuse me for a moment I'll get a match and light a lamp in here."

Brazo could tell she was excited. But he had to go on.

"No," he said quietly, "don't light any more lamps. Go back into the kitchen and put that one out. Take your stuff off the stove. Then come in here and I'll tell you what's happened."

She stiffened, tried to pierce the darkness between them in an effort to see him. He heard her catch her breath. But she was courageous, as he expected she would be, and instantly obeyed him. He heard something being moved back on the stove; heard her close a window as if with a divination that danger lurked outside. Yes; she had courage, and keen intelligence.

Then the lamp went out and he heard her moving toward him.

She was familiar with the rooms and with the location of the furniture, for he heard the rustle of her dress as she came swiftly forward. Then the thought came to him that she must trust him greatly to obey him so unhesitatingly.

She was standing close to him when she spoke. There

was curiosity in her voice and a queer tenseness, but no unsteadiness.

"What is it, Brazo?"

"Nothing, maybe," he answered. "But we are not taking any chances." He told her what had happened in the deserted saloon building, and how Wilson's men had scattered and advanced as though meditating an attack. He told her gently, for he didn't want to frighten her unnecessarily, though he wanted her to know exactly what the situation was.

"Brinn thinks they have an idea you know where Jim got the gold and they mean to get hold of you and make you tell them," he added. "But we'll stop that. I mean to stay here with you. We'll try to surprise them, and maybe we'll get two or three of them that way before they know they've got started. Brinn is staying outside."

"So Brinn saved your life," said Ella.

In the dense blackness of the room he could not see her face, but her voice had a strange tremor in it, a leap. There was a little silence and then she said in a low voice, as though speaking to herself, "That was worth it."

"Worth what?" asked Brazo.

"Oh," she said, "nothing. I must have been thinking aloud!"

She went on:

"Have you known Brinn long?"

"I've seen him around here. He puzzled me. I was sure I'd seen him somewhere before. But to-night I recognized him. He's the short man I shot at Bain's

Camp. I thought I had killed him. He's the only one left, besides myself, that was there when the paymaster was killed. He accused me of doing the killing."

"But he's with you—with us now?" she asked.

"Looks like he is. He's a bloodthirsty devil."

He wanted to ask her a few questions about Brinn, about her apparent friendship with the man, about his visits. But he forebore.

No sound had as yet broken the outside stillness. There was activity out there, and by this time, if Wilson meditated seizing Ella, his men must be slowly closing upon the ranch house. They would move carefully, anticipating resistance from himself and Brinn, but they would not expose themselves until a reconnaissance disclosed the whereabouts of the defenders. They must know, of course, that Brazo and Brinn were the only two men in camp, for they had probably been in the vicinity all day, watching and planning a time to strike.

Brazo moved to the doorway leading from the front room to the dining room. His rifle was lying in the crook of his left elbow, his right hand was caressing the stock. The windows were black, but he knew that anyone attempting to enter the house would have to enter through one of the windows, for the doors were locked and the front one heavily barred. He had forgotten to ask about the back door, and he did so now.

"It is locked," answered Ella.

He had almost started at the sound of her voice. It was close—at his shoulder.

"It seems so quiet and peaceful," she said, "just as if

nothing like this could possibly happen. Oh, I hope you and Brinn are wrong!"

"I hope so, too," he said. He shook his head, knowing that in the darkness she could not see the movement or the grim doubt in his eyes. He didn't expect to survive the night, though he would do his best. When Wilson and his men discovered that there was only one man in the house, they would probably rush it concertedly. They would do nothing while the darkness held, but when the moon rose so that they could distinguish objects clearly, they would station themselves at the windows and get him under a cross fire.

He blamed himself. If he had devoted less of his time to jealousy and more of it to the possibility of doing something for the protection of the woman he loved, she would not now be facing the dire prospect of falling into Wilson's hands. For months he had stayed away from her, nursing his selfish thoughts, skulking about in sullen anger, letting her bear the entire burden of planning and building and scheming to make the place habitable.

He felt her hand on his arm. Her voice was close; he felt her breath on his cheek.

"Brazo," she said.

"Yes."

"I—I don't hate you."

"That's all right," he answered. "I don't blame you for hating me."

He didn't blame her. His actions must have made him hateful in her eyes. He had conducted himself badly; he had been a fool.

"But I don't!" she insisted. "And I'm sorry."

"Sorry you don't hate me?" he said.

"Sorry I said that," she answered. There was regret in her voice, a plea.

A grim humour had taken possession of him. He didn't believe her. And besides, even if she didn't hate him, she couldn't love him. How could she love him?

He wasn't the type of man women loved. He was too selfish; he demanded too much. He couldn't express his love for her, he couldn't make her understand by his actions. His jealousy would never permit him to be himself. He had gone around with a long face and a dour expression, and naturally he had failed to attract her. For many months he had lived in the cabin with her and in all that time he had made no progress.

"Shucks," he said, "it don't make any difference."

"It does make a difference!" she said, with a vigour that astonished him. "I don't hate you, and I want you to know it! I—I've wanted to tell you, but you wouldn't come near me. Brazo, I wanted you to come!"

Her intense earnestness amazed him. Wonderingly, he turned his head and looked down at her, vainly trying to see her face. She had pressed closer to him; her soft, yielding body was against his, and one of her arms was stealing up over his shoulder and curving around his neck. He was trembling with a great eagerness.

He turned, set the rifle against the wall, and put his arms around her, holding her tightly and pressing her cheek against his, so that the hair over her temples was in his eyes and the delicate fragrance of it intoxicated him.

"I never thought this would happen," he whispered. "I had given you up."

"I meant it should be this way," she said, her voice muffled against his shoulder. "From the beginning," she added. "Oh, Brazo, I didn't want you to think—to believe you could have me just because you wanted me."

"You knew I wanted you?" he asked.

"Yes. You made it so plain, Brazo. I knew, too, that I wanted you. But you assumed so much. You went right ahead with everything, just as though—just as though you would take me whether I wanted you to or not. And I had to teach you that you couldn't."

A rising moon was tingeing the window panes with a yellow light, and a flood of pale gold stole in upon them, revealing their faces to each other. Then to their ears came the faint hoot of an owl and Brazo reached for his rifle.

She was in his arms again before he could grasp the weapon, and for a moment he held her, kissing her with a passion he had never felt until now. He finally pushed her gently from him and held her, his hands on her cheeks. He could now dimly see her eyes, smiling into his.

"I didn't know I loved you so much," he said.

But now he stiffened, reached for the rifle, and drew it to him. For the hooting of the owl had come again, and Brazo knew that Brinn was telling him that two of Wilson's men were near.

"They've come," he told Ella. "You go upstairs and lie on the floor until it's over."

She obeyed him without making a protest of any kind. He could hear her step on the floor as she moved in the semi-darkness toward the stairway in the big front room.

CHAPTER XXIX

BRINN had told Brazo that he would not signal unless he was unable to get a "bead" upon the prowlers, and as Brinn would be near the cabin, which was west of the ranch house, Brazo decided that the hooting indicated that Wilson's men were approaching from the east and that there were two of them. Therefore Brazo watched the east windows.

The moonlight was growing brighter. Standing in the doorway between the front room and the dining room, Brazo had command of the east windows of those two rooms and of one rear window in the kitchen. There was only one window in the western wall of the front room and only one in the west wall of the dining room. These Brinn would cover, since, as his hooting indicated, he was watching that side of the house. The moonlight had entered the east windows only for a short time, for the moon was high in the sky before its rays cleared the high wall of the butte beside the river. It was now nearing the zenith of its arch and was shining almost straight down.

The light outside was clear, and Brazo could distinguish the trees and brush at the edge of the clearing that stretched eastward from the house. The rear of the house was close to a clump of brush that grew at the edge of the timber in that direction, and as the timber offered better cover than could be found eastward,

Brazo was confident that one of the rear windows would be the first point of attack, unless some of the men had stolen across the east clearing in the darkness and were crouching close to the wall, awaiting an opportune moment.

Brazo knew that his position was not good. If the outlaws made a concerted attack, he would have to move fast from one room to another to escape their fire and to return it. The walls and the doorways constituted his only barricade. There were too many windows in the house to make his position advantageous, and he would not have entered the house at all had he not feared that in the period of blackness preceding moonrise the outlaws would have been able to steal upon the house without his knowing of their movements.

He stood in the doorway, listening. No sound reached him. Then he heard a sound at the rear door. The latch clicked upward, the door creaked as if a heavy body were pressing against it. The bar rattled slightly in its slots. Brazo heard the latch click down again. They had discovered that the door was barred and could not be opened from the outside.

Almost simultaneously there was a creak at the front door. The sound indicated that there were at least two men attempting to gain entrance and that they had a hope that one of the two doors might have been left unbarred. They would not attempt to batter the doors down, for fear of the resulting noise bringing Brazo and Brinn upon them. And Brazo was convinced that they would not have approached the house at all had they known he was inside. They would do what they had come to do without a fight, if possible, and their stealthy

actions seemed to indicate that they thought Ella would be alone in the house.

They would now try the windows.

Brazo stepped back into a corner of the dining room where he could keep most of the windows in view without moving. He heard a light footfall on the veranda and suspected that the man who had tried the front door would now seek one of the windows. If he went to the west side of the house, Brinn would see him, and that would mean the end of him, but if he went around to the east side, he would probably stop at the window nearest the veranda, which was the farthest toward the front of the living room.

Brazo watched that window. Nothing happened. But a sound from the rear of the house reached him, and he shifted his gaze quickly, to see the head and shoulders of a man clearly outlined against the glass of the kitchen window.

He raised his rifle and sighted along the barrel. But he waited, to make certain of the man's intentions. He did not mean to kill until he had to, but he would kill rather than permit any of the men to enter the house.

When the sound continued, and he observed that the man was working with an implement that resembled an iron bar and that the fastenings of the sash were cracking with the strain and would presently give way, he sighted along the rifle barrel again and pulled the trigger.

The vicious crash of the rifle was accompanied by the man's sharp cry and the tinkling of glass. Brazo did not wait to observe the result of the shot, but leaped out

of the corner in which he had been standing and flattened himself against the wall of the front room. He heard the tinkle of glass again, and the thudding of a bullet against the wall near where he had been standing.

While he stood with his back against the wall, he heard the sharp, dry crack of a rifle outside, following the report of the one which had sped the bullet into the wall near the spot from which he had fired. A high, shrill shriek came from a point near one of the west windows. Brazo's grin was grimly humorous. The man who had tried the front door had chosen a window in the west wall, and Brinn had got him.

Brinn was alert. He could envisage Brinn's face as he had sped the bullet. Brinn liked to fight, liked to kill. The passion was visible in him, as certain other passions were visible in the eyes of other men. Brinn was primitive, his impulses were atavistic; fighting was an expression of his nature. Unless Brinn exposed himself, Brazo need have no fear that he would be shot at from any of the west windows.

And now, following the shooting, there came sounds from outside as of men running through tall, dry grass. Then silence. A dead, foreboding silence.

The stillness was broken presently by a rustle and a step, and Brazo saw Ella moving down the open stairway. She had both hands pressed against her breast. Her face was startlingly white in the semi-gloom.

"Don't come down!" Brazo called softly. "There'll be more of it. They're not through yet!"

She stood on the bottom step peering toward him.

"You're not hurt, Brazo?" she asked, a quaver of apprehension in her voice.

"I'm all right. Please don't go near the windows."

"I saw a man shoot through one of the windows, Brazo. Are you sure he didn't hit you?"

"Pretty sure," he laughed. "But look here! How did you see that man?"

"I was looking down on him from one of the windows," she said defiantly. "I saw him level his rifle. I was going to shoot him, but he wouldn't stand still long enough. Then he ran into the timber with several other men. I think they are there now, watching."

Brazo observed that she had a huge Colt in her right hand. The weapon loomed gigantic in contrast to her slender arm.

"Shucks," he exclaimed impatiently, "you go right upstairs and stay there!"

"I won't!" she defied.

"Then I'll carry you up!" he threatened. "Do you think I want you killed, now—now?"

"Oh, Brazo, I want to stay with you!"

"Go back upstairs!" he commanded.

"Please, Brazo! I will worry about you."

"And when you go up there I want you to stay away from those windows!" he went on, ignoring her plea.

"Brazo," she said coldly, "I won't have you speaking to me like that. And if you are going to be so bossy after we are married, I won't marry you!"

Brazo had no answer. He was silent. He did not want to argue with her, and he thought that if he did not answer she would obey him. Yet he was rather surprised when she did obey. But it seemed she only went to the landing, at the turn, for almost instantly her head appeared again.

"You'll be careful, Brazo?" she said. "If you should be killed now, after what has happened, I should want to die, too!"

"I'll be careful," he answered, "for I want to be with you for a good many years."

Yet, after she vanished, he stood gazing grimly out of one of the windows. He wasn't very optimistic about his future or about Ella's. Wilson's men were numerous; he did not know how numerous. They had the advantage of being able to concentrate their attention upon the house and the cabin which Brinn had chosen, while Brinn and Ella and himself would not know from which direction an attack would come. Around the house was the timber, in which Wilson's men could move with little fear of being seen from the cabin; there were hills and gullies and natural coverts of rock in and behind which they might lie concealed, to shoot when opportunity came. They had a wide range for their activities; they were near water; they could bring their food in.

And there was little chance of outside interference. The camp was deserted. The marshal had gone with the others, and it was unlikely that any strangers would come in. Brazo had lived in the cabin many months, and in that time he had had no visitors. No one in the section had paid any attention to the cabin or the basin; he had been as completely isolated as if he had been in the middle of a desert.

Anderson and the other men would return, of course. But they would have set no definite time, and if they were not warned, they would very likely be ambushed by Wilson's men.

Wilson need not take any unnecessary chances. He had been surprised once, and from now on he would be wary. He would have his men surround the house and the cabin. During the day, his men would retreat to the concealment of the timber, while at night they would come closer.

However, Brazo was certain they would not attack again that night. They knew, now, that Ella was not alone in the house, and no matter how many men Wilson had had in the beginning, the number had been reduced by two. Probably the two dead men had been carried away, to be buried, and their deaths would inevitably affect the morale of the remainder.

Yet Brazo did not relax his vigilance. He went back to the doorway between the front room and the dining room and watched the windows. The moon was bright, and by its light he could see the clearing and the edge of the timber. There was no movement out there. The tall grass, the tree stumps, the scattered clumps of brush, were clearly defined in the golden flood that bathed the clearing.

Brazo did not hear Brinn again, but knowing something of the man's nature, he was convinced that he was concealed somewhere in the vicinity, watching. Grinning, too, probably. Thinking of the man he had killed; enjoying a mental picture of the discomfiture of the other outlaws.

Brinn himself was an outlaw, and yet he seemed to take pleasure in killing men of his type. There in the timber he had actually danced in his eagerness to kill King and Bill. A strange man. Yet he liked Ella; he had saved Brazo's life. It was impossible for Brazo to supply

a motive for Brinn's friendship. He had shown Brinn that he disliked him; he had deliberately taunted the man, hoping to arouse him to the point of drawing his gun. At Bain's Camp he had shot Brinn, and Brinn had by his own admission spent several months in a hospital as a result of that shooting. And yet Brinn had stepped in to save him from being shot down by King and Bill. Brazo was puzzled.

The night was long to Brazo. He grew tired from his vigil and walked slowly back and forth through the house. No sounds reached him. Toward three o'clock in the morning the moonlight gradually faded, vanished. Darkness deeper than that of the evening, obscured the clearing and the timber edge. Now, if Wilson meditated another attack, it would come.

But no attack came. About four o'clock the blackness outside began to fade to a dull gray. The gray lightened, became silvery. The clearing again became visible, and presently it was aglow with the brilliance of day.

Then Brazo heard Ella descending the stairs. He moved toward her, for the front-room windows were curtained with a light, filmy muslin that dropped straight down concealing objects from outside when no artificial light was used.

Ella's face was pale. There were faint dark circles under her eyes, showing that she had not slept and that tragedy and the imminence of more tragedy had shaken her. But her eyes glowed at sight of Brazo, and in an instant she was in his arms.

"You didn't sleep a wink," he charged, after a time.

"How could I? I kept thinking of you, down here alone."

"And you watched from the windows up there," he said.

"Yes," she admitted.

Brazo no longer felt any embarrassment when meeting her eyes. Strangely, it was she who now dropped her gaze, and she blushed rosily in his embrace.

This was a different Ella. There was a gentleness in her manner that he had not been aware of; a mystic atmosphere surrounded her; a wondrous graciousness that seemed to have developed since her surrender to him was in her.

They went together to the kitchen door and stood there for some time looking into the room. The kitchen table had a cloth over its top, and the dishes that Ella had placed in preparation the night before were still there. Upon the stove was a small kettle partly filled with potatoes that she had cooked; there was a pan with a small portion of meat in it, another kettle containing a vegetable, and a coffee pot which had been left on the fire in the girl's haste to answer Brazo's summons. The fire was out.

They were hungry, despite the tragedy of the night before, and as they stood there looking into the room they smiled at each other. But they could not enter the kitchen without being seen by Wilson's men. There were no curtains on the windows and they would be visible from the timber.

"I can slide along the wall and get to the stove," suggested Brazo.

She held him.

"You shan't!" she declared. "I have got you now, and I am not going to let them shoot you!"

She left him abruptly and strode boldly across the room to one of the windows before Brazo could move to prevent her. With Brazo standing rigid in the doorway, she opened the top sash and stood for an instant while a slight breeze stirred her hair. Brazo was convinced that she smiled in the direction of the concealed outlaws. Anyway, she was smiling, though perhaps a little stiffly, when she turned, looked at Brazo, and began to work with the cooking utensils on the stove.

Brazo was wiping cold perspiration from his forehead.

"Lord!" he exclaimed. His face had paled.

She continued unconcernedly with the kettles and pans, giving him a cool, bright smile.

"It isn't me they want to kill, you know," she said.

"But you dared them! You smiled at them!" he said weakly.

"Of course. I had to show them that I am not afraid." She removed the lids from the stove and built a fire with some wood that was piled in a corner. Then she emptied the coffee pot, filled it with water from a pail, and placed it over the fire. She got bread from a cupboard, sugar, bacon, canned milk. While working, she talked to Brazo, though she did not look toward him when she might be seen from one of the windows, for fear the outlaws might discover he was near her and chance a shot at him. So she talked to the stove and the table.

"You are not to come out into my kitchen," she said. "Remember that. They would be sure to shoot if they

suspected you were here. They don't know, now; they can only guess. It is quite likely they are puzzled. Perhaps they even think I did the shooting last night. But, no matter what they think, they will not shoot unless they feel you are here."

They ate in the dining room, where the curtains were close enough together to form a screen. Ella pulled down the shades of the east windows so that no light might shine through. She spoke of Brinn, and Brazo told her there was plenty of food in the cabin, so that Brinn could eat if he was there.

"And he's there, all right," concluded Brazo. "He's too smart to stay in the open during the day. And they'll not try any foolishness with him!"

The day passed slowly, and they saw no one, not even Brinn.

They occasionally heard voices in the timber, but not once did any of the outlaws appear. As Ella had divined, Wilson was puzzled. His visit to the ranch house had been disastrous, and he would wait until he devised a plan to approach it with a minimum of danger to himself and his men.

In spite of the menace that hovered near, Ella was in good spirits during the day. It was when twilight came that she grew serious and gazed soberly out of one of the east windows at the deserted town. There was something in the appearance of the place that terrified her. She had a feeling that some of the tents and buildings were occupied by the outlaws; that they had withdrawn to them to wait until she or Brazo or Brinn relaxed their vigilance. Greed had founded the town, and she had always feared it. There was something repellent in its

appearance. The dust of months had settled over it. The frame buildings were warped, unpainted. Most of them had sagged out of their original perpendicular positions and were leaning maudlinly. Their doors were open, their black interiors yawned horribly with their emptiness. The tents that still remained were grimy and shabby. Some of the stake ropes were gone, others were slack. Canvas roofs and side walls had caved in. Some kerosene torches had been left, and the elements had rusted them. Some of their lashings had given way and the torches were dangling drunkenly. Here and there were piles of lumber which had been abandoned by the enthusiasts who had rushed headlong in their search for the yellow metal. Boxes, crates, barrels, kegs, bottles, cans, were strewn about. Desolation had set a heavy hand over it all. A brooding silence was in the atmosphere of the place. There was mockery in the whispering of the slight breeze that swept over it.

Standing near Brazo, she shuddered. And Brazo, quick to catch her moods, put an arm about her and drew her close. To his amazement, she hid her face on his shoulder and sobbed.

He soothed her, for he knew what was happening to her. But she still clung to him, shivering.

"Oh, Brazo, I wish the other men were here!" she cried. "Wilson is planning to attack us again to-night. I know it! I feel that something terrible is going to happen!"

It had grown dark while they were standing there. The shadows stole into the timber, over the clearing, and into the house. A monstrous hush had come.

And then the sound of a shot outside the house broke the silence, followed by a screech of agony.

Ella pulled away from Brazo and stared at the blackness of the window pane.

"My God!" she whispered; "that's Brinn's voice!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE voice was Brinn's, for Brazo had also recognized it. And now, as Brazo stood rigid, fighting an impulse to go to Brinn, yet knowing that to do so would be to expose Ella to further danger, Ella's hands were upon his shoulders, and her voice, her trembling muscles were urging him.

"Go and help him, Brazo!"

He shook his head, telling her that he could not leave her, even to help Brinn, even though he owed Brinn his help.

"They'd rush you here," he said. "The chances are they are watching the house, waiting for me to do just what you want me to do. They'd be in here the minute I went out. Brinn wouldn't want that; he wouldn't expect it."

"But he's hurt, Brazo!" She was silent for an instant. Then she said: "He did as much for you! He saved your life, Brazo! Won't you do as much for him? If he's hurt and can't defend himself, they'll kill him! Please! I'll stand right in the dining-room doorway with my gun and the first man that tries to get in I will kill! Brazo, I can't stay in here and think of Brinn out there, alone! If you don't go, I shall!"

She was pushing Brazo toward the front door. He gripped her arms and held her tight.

"You'll sure shoot if they come in?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered firmly.

He turned from her, unbarred the door, opened it, and stepped out upon the veranda into darkness so dense that he could not even distinguish the huge bulk of the house. He crossed the veranda cautiously, felt the edge of it with his feet, and stepped stealthily down to the ground. He stood for an instant listening, trying to penetrate the darkness in an effort to locate the cabin. He now wished that he had visited the house in the daylight, for then he would have had a clear idea regarding its location. Not half a dozen times since they had begun to erect the ranch house had he looked toward it, for it had represented defeat and had symbolized the growing ascendency of his rival. Sullenly he had blinded himself to it, obstinately he had refused to become interested in it. As a consequence, although he knew it was several hundred yards east of the cabin and that there was a clearing around it which was featured by various small gullies and hills, he had no intimate knowledge of the character of the ground he had to cross to get to the cabin.

That there were coverts in which Wilson's men might at this minute be hiding was certain; and that at any minute he might stumble into one of those coverts was possible, even probable. In that case, his end would be sudden and unexpected. And Ella would be alone.

Therefore, he moved slowly and carefully. He tried to follow the edge of the timber over the route he had travelled in order to reach the house the night before. But to-night he was without the light in the kitchen window to guide him, and there was no light in the cabin.

He made some noise. He crashed into unseen brush and against low-hanging branches of trees, and occasionally he stepped upon dead twigs that snapped with alarming distinctness. Frequently, he stopped to listen for sounds that would tell him the outlaws were trying to gain entrance to the house. But there were no sounds except those made by himself.

He went on. When he felt that he had followed the edge of the timber far enough, he left it and started through the clearing, which was upon his right, northward. After a while, he reached a section which was level and smooth under his feet, and he knew he had struck an area of sand which surrounded the cabin.

He was now on familiar ground, and he moved forward swiftly until his groping hands came into contact with the walls he knew well. There he stopped again and listened. No sounds came out of the heavy surrounding silence.

He went on again, reached a corner, turned it, and approached the cabin door. Again he stopped and listened, and still no sound reached him.

He entered the cabin and felt his way carefully through it. He searched the addition, ran his hands over the bunk which had been his for several months. He had decided that Brinn was not in the cabin, and was moving toward the door when his booted feet came sharply against a yielding object in the floor near the table and a low groan reached his ears.

Brinn? A wounded man, anyway.

He went to his knees, ran his left hand over the body, felt of the face.

"Brinn?" he whispered.

"It's you, eh?" came Brinn's voice. He sighed, apparently with relief. "Hell!" he said. "I heard you sneakin' in, but I thought it was one of them hyenas comin' in here to finish me! I'd holed up in the cabin all day. Soon as it got dark, I went out an' got in some heavy brush back of a big boulder. I heard the scum movin' around me, but I couldn't see none of them. One of them must have seen me, though, for pretty soon I got nailed in the side. Some way I got away from there and got in here, crawlin'. I've lost my gun an' rifle." He paused; then went on:

"Where's Ella?"

"In the house."

"You damned fool!" exclaimed Brinn hoarsely, "you don't mean to tell me you left her there alone!" He squirmed, tried to rise, and fell back again, groaning.

"You get out of here, damn you!" he raged, choking. "They'll get her sure! Get back there an' take care of her! Chances are they're there right now! I heard them all around me, goin' that way! Why, damn your hide, you ain't got the sense of a blind dogie! Get! Or I'll choke hell out of you!"

As if in verification of Brinn's presentiment, there came to the ears of both men at that instant the distant roar of a heavy revolver. Then three more reports.

Brinn threshed on the floor, vainly trying to rise. He cursed, screamed maledictions.

Brazo could hear the curses as he raced recklessly through the clearing toward the ranch house. Twice he plunged headlong into clumps of brush and through them, falling heavily into the grass beyond them and losing his sense of direction upon regaining his feet.

Each time he grew confused he was set straight by a heavy thumping as of someone banging against a door with a heavy battering ram, or by the crashing tinkle of breaking glass.

They had not got into the house, it seemed, but they were attacking it upon all sides. The shots fired must have been from Ella's revolver, but there was no way of his knowing what damage she had done with them; and as no further reports came, he was fearful that some of the men had already got into the house.

He was running with his head down and with every muscle of his body straining to add more speed to his pace, when a foot caught in some obstruction and sent him hurtling headforemost into the black void. His head struck a rigid object, his spine seemed to crack; the surrounding blackness was illumined by flashing comets and pin-wheels of glowing fire through which he fell into oblivion.

CHAPTER XXXI

ONE instinct dominated Brazo. Every sense seemed to have died, for he had no conscious emotion when at last he got to his feet and stood swaying back and forth in the blackness. He had no idea where he was or why he was trying to stand. He got up because he had been going somewhere when he fell and because the habit of man to stand upright had urged him. He had forgotten where he had intended to go, but he had got up facing the ranch house and he began to stagger toward it. He did not know the ranch house was there, but the obscure instinct that had brought him to his feet still gripped him, still drove him to expend his remaining vitality in an effort to accomplish the object that the brain had evolved. It was the fighting instinct.

Not until he had staggered onward several hundred feet did consciousness return to him. And with consciousness came slowly back the strength that had flown from him, the terrible apprehension, the sullen rage, the deadly hatred for the men who had struck at Ella in his absence.

He did not know how long he had been unconscious, but as he ran he observed that there was now a light in the ranch house, so he felt that he had come too late. When he reached the veranda, he observed that the front door was wide open and battered to splinters.

He drew his gun as he leaped into the doorway, but a glance told him there would be no one here to shoot.

Wilson's men had come and gone. The furniture was overturned, the carpets torn up, the front room was wrecked. He ran to the door that led into the dining room and saw in the light from a bracket lamp the same chaotic disorder. He glanced around the kitchen and in the dim light reflected from the dining room observed that it, too, was wrecked. They had even torn the cupboards from the wall. Brazo knew why. They had been searching for Jim Henley's papers, which they hoped would reveal the spot where Henley had made his "strike."

But Brazo was out of the kitchen with a rush. He leaped through the dining room, into the big front room, up the stairs. He groped through the upper rooms, calling, hoping Ella had hidden herself there. She was not upstairs.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs he stood for an instant, reeling, blinded by the accession of a new rage. Then he ran out on the veranda, leaped down, and raced back toward the cabin.

The moon had come, now, and was shining calmly down, flooding the world with a silvery radiance.

Shortly Brazo was bending over Brinn, telling him what had happened.

"Sure!" raved the short man. "That's what you get for leavin' her! Now they've got her an' she'll have hell! They've gone! I heard them not more than half an hour ago! They went clatterin' by here like the devil was after them! They've got her, an' they're takin' her to their cache. You know where that is! Oh, damn them, I

wish I could get up! It's your fault, Brazo!" he added, his voice now almost a whine. "What are you standing here for? Go get her!"

He writhed and again tried to rise as Brazo leaped out of the doorway. But somewhere his body seemed paralyzed, and he could only lift himself to his right elbow, and that merely for an instant. He sank to the floor again and lay there muttering and screaming futile curses.

Brazo was in the stable throwing saddle and bridle on Blinky. He swung up just outside the stable door and leaped Blinky across the level that led westward into the timber. However, he did not go into the timber, but skirted its edge and rode along the bank of the river to a crossing. He was drenched by the spume that Blinky's forelegs swished over him.

Blinky's leaps over the floor of the basin were prodigious. In that first terrific rush, he seemed to realize what was wanted of him. He did not slacken his pace when he struck the upland, and he went over the crest of the ridge above the basin in half a dozen tremendous bounds. He fled over the higher level without urging, dipped into a gully with sickening velocity, and straightened out on a level beyond, running with long, smooth undulations.

The moonlight was brilliant and the trail ahead visible. Blinky had been in the section before, and he needed little guiding. He ran on over the face of the land like some winged beast that merely touched the higher points here and there, puffs of dust occasionally erupting to mark his progress. He vanished behind a long line of timber, and reappeared farther on against

a background of blue sky, star-dotted. For a time he was lost in a gorge, but presently he went out of it to another plain, where a long line of dust puffs revealed his passing.

He vanished again at the bottom of a long slope. A little later the moonlight disclosed him deep in the saccatone grass of a lowland, a bobbing, rushing, dark projectile tearing through an emerald sea.

He went more slowly up a far slope, and for a time he halted on its crest. Then suddenly he was gone again, and silence closed behind him and engulfed him.

Half a dozen coyotes slunk out of some timber and stared after him, their nostrils twitching. For a time they followed the hoof prints in the sand. Other denizens of the land scurried here and there, frightened by the plunging monster that had ricochetted through their domain.

Blinky ran on and on, doing his best. His rider seemed to know that more could not be asked, for the spurs did not touch Blinky, and there came no sound, no word of praise or blame.

On another high plain, far westward, Blinky slowed. It was here that he had come in another time that he remembered, and his wisdom took him to a certain spot where he had once been tied. And when he divined that his run was over he halted, spread his legs apart, and heaved air into his exhausted lungs.

Brazo slid off.

At the edge of the declivity that he had descended in his quest for Ella's suitcase, he paused and stared downward at Wilson's cabin, at the corral, at the surrounding country. The fact that the cabin had no light in it, and that there were no horses in the corral, caused

him to catch his breath in amazement. He had thought he would find them here; that they would have brought Ella here.

Brinn had told him he had heard Wilson and his men riding away about half an hour before Brazo had appeared to the short man, following Brazo's recovery from his period of unconsciousness. Yet they were not here, nor had he seen any sign of them on the trail. Had they any other rendezvous?

He knew of only this one.

He slid down the slope and ran to the shack. He paused at the door, to listen, for this silence might mean that they had expected pursuit and had prepared for it by hiding their horses and waiting for him in the darkness of the shack. But though he stood beside the door for several minutes, he heard no sound from inside. Then, bracing himself, he stepped through the doorway.

Still no sound. There was no one inside the shack. He searched, but made no light.

He emerged in the grip of a cold and futile rage.

They had expected pursuit and had tricked him. He was certain they had no other cache. He was convinced that they had seen him riding the trail and had ridden deep into some timber to permit him to pass. They would remain in the timber until some of them, sneaking after him, could kill him.

He climbed the slope and stood beside Blinky. The horse was still breathing fast but was apparently in good condition. But he did not mount until he had carefully scanned the surrounding timber and brush and had gazed for a time over the back trail.

A feeling of impotence, which had been born in him

within the past few minutes, was growing. He was afflicted with a terrible yearning to strike, to come into violent physical contact with the men who had taken Ella. But his opposition was as evanescent as the moonbeams that filtered down upon him through the trees.

In the few minutes following his ascent of the slope after searching the shack he came very near yielding to a frenzy which would have sent him racing Blinky here and there among the timber clumps, into gorges, behind ridges in a wild desire to find the girl. But that course, while it might have gratified his yearning for action, would doubtless have been fruitless in its results, and his cold, stern reason dissuaded him.

There were some things that a man could not prevent. He would always accuse himself of weakness in leaving Ella to go to Brinn's assistance; if anything happened to her, he would have only himself to blame throughout the empty years that would follow, but he would take the keenness from the edge of his regret by slaying every man of the band that had taken her.

Yet, though reason still ruled him, his brain was whirling, a chaos of conflicting passions as he threw himself upon his horse and started over the back trail. His hatred of Wilson, never more than merely a contemptuous dislike, had become malignant and deadly. He knew now that he had made a mistake in not killing the man in their fight at the camp months before. He had made the same mistake in Tombstone. It would not be made the third time.

He rode back toward the ranch house slowly. There was nothing to be gained by haste. Before he could

punish Wilson, he must find him. So, as he rode, he searched the timber clumps on both sides of the trail, the various gorges, the gulches, the small basins, the stretches of brush that grew here and there.

The moon sank behind the mountains as he continued his search, and darkness came again to blot the country out of his vision. While the darkness lasted, he sat motionless on Blinky in the middle of a level stretch of sand, waiting for the blackness to lift. He did not move until dawn broke in the eastern sky. Then, instead of searching for possible coverts, he began to look for hoof tracks.

This was faster work than searching blindly in the timber, and yet in two hours he could find no place where he could see signs that any riders had passed. It was not until he had travelled more than half the distance back toward the ranch house that he became convinced that Wilson's men had not ridden the trail at all! They had gone in another direction!

Grimly, he again gave Blinky the rein. As before, Blinky flashed across the country like a meteor. At a distance of perhaps two miles from the basin, Brazo heard the faint report of an exploding firearm. It seemed to come from the direction of the ranch house. He spoke to Blinky, and the animal increased his speed. He went bounding over the crest of the southern ridge of the basin like a huge cat, and at the bottom he straightened out in the wildest run of his life.

Twice while crossing the basin Brazo again heard shots, and as Blinky drew nearer to the ranch house there came others. Brazo could see little puffs of white smoke in the vicinity of the house; he presently drew

so near that he could hear yells of pain and shouts of rage. Then, crossing the river and sweeping down along the edge of the timber, Brazo was close enough to see several horsemen breaking out of the timber near the ranch house. They were shooting as they rode.

Passing the cabin, he saw Anderson kneeling behind a stump in the clearing, aiming a rifle. The rifle was resting on the top of the stump, and its muzzle was moving slowly, following the movements of one of the riders. The weapon belched a lance of smoke, and one of the riders threw up both arms and tumbled out of the saddle. While Brazo was covering the few hundred yards to where Anderson knelt behind the stump, three other riders went down. Two of the riders seemed destined to get away, but finally there remained only one. The other was hit by a bullet from Hardin's rifle. He toppled forward, slipped sideways, and his horse carried him out of sight in the timber. Hardin was standing at one of the rear corners of the ranch house when he fired the final shot. He now looked at Brazo, grinned grimly, and walked toward Anderson.

Brazo slipped from the saddle at Anderson's side. Anderson had got up. He looked at Brazo and spoke quickly.

"Seems like Wilson's men have got Ella Wainright. We got in about half an hour ago and found Brinn nearly dead. He told us what had been happenin'. We went to the ranch house an' found it wrecked an' Ella gone. We came out again an' went back to Brinn. Then we saw Wilson an' his gang in the timber an' we cut loose without askin' any questions. We got seven or eight of them, mebbe more. Wilson went into the ranch house when

things got too hot out here. I reckon he's still there. He dropped his rifle while he was runnin', so he's only got his Colt. We figured on gettin' him after we got the rest of the scum. But Ella ain't with him, an' I thought mebbe we'd ketch him an' hang him! She's gone, Brazo!"

Anderson's eyes were flaming with passion, but he appeared awed when he glanced at Brazo.

Brazo's face was dead white. With Anderson's word about Ella not being with Wilson, his passions had burned out and there was only one purpose left—to kill Wilson. They had tricked him. They had not taken Ella far. While he had been hunting them, they had worked their will upon the girl. In the timber near the house. Somewhere along the river. In their determination to force her to tell where her brother had found the gold, they had tortured her, perhaps killed her. Then they had returned to the ranch house to continue their search. For Brazo knew Ella had not told them, and they would finish the destruction of the ranch buildings in an attempt to find what they sought.

Whatever they had done to Ella was enough. They had touched her, degraded her by depriving her of her liberty. They must have threatened her, treated her brutally. They had probably concealed her somewhere, while they returned and finished their search. That meant, of course, that they had tied her. They had also probably gagged her.

So his thoughts ran.

If there was passion in his heart, there was no fire in the passion. He was cold, calm. Only one purpose was in him, the determination to kill Wilson. He had no hatred for the man now, only a determination to kill

him. But before he killed Wilson he would force him to tell where he had left Ella.

He left Anderson and Hardin and strode toward the ranch house. They followed at a little distance, awed by his mood.

Wilson could not leave the house. Two of the Wainright men were on the east side, where they could watch the side and the front and rear. Anderson and Hardin were on the west side.

When Brazo entered the front door, he drew his gun, for he was convinced that Wilson would fire upon him at sight.

Wilson was not in the front room, and so Brazo went to the door leading into the dining room. There, in a corner, gun in hand, facing the door, stood Wilson.

Wilson's gun was levelled. Brazo's gun was rigid in his right hand, the forearm tight against his waist, the elbow crooked. Wilson's hand was shaking, his eyes were glaring with the fear of death; the muzzle of his weapon was moving in jerky circles. It was evident that he had heard Brazo coming, had decided to kill him the instant he stepped into the room, and that at sight of Brazo his courage had failed.

Brazo stepped away from the doorway and stood at the end of the room facing his enemy. He spoke, and his voice seemed to fill the room with its grim resonance.

"Wilson, where is Ella Wainright?" he said.

Wilson stared. His lips twitched, drew away from his teeth in a snarl.

"I ain't seen her, damn you!" he answered, his voice hoarse and quivering.

"Wilson," said Brazo, "Anderson told me you were

in here. Most of your men are dead. I came in here to kill you. But I'm giving you another chance. Where is Ella Wainright?"

As if the fear of death had paralyzed his fingers, Wilson's gun dropped from his hand and clattered heavily upon the floor. He crouched farther into his corner. For an instant his lips worked soundlessly, and then words shrieked out of them.

"Don't shoot, Brazo! For God's sake, don't shoot! I'll tell all I know!"

He wet his lips and stared wildly at Brazo and at Anderson and Hardin and some of the other men that had come into the house and were watching from the doorways.

"We came in here to get her," said Wilson. "We was goin' to make her talk about her brother's gold. We was goin' to make her tell. That's right. I don't deny that. But we wasn't goin' to hurt her, Brazo. I swear we wasn't!

"But when we broke in the front door she shot three or four times. When we finally got in, the back door was open an' she was gone. We heard her runnin'. Her dress was ketchin' on the brush she run through. Me an' some more of the boys went after her. We couldn't see her on account of the darkness, but we could hear her just ahead of us. Then, down near the river, we lost her. That's the truth, Brazo. I ain't seen her!"

Brazo's eyes had held a derisive gleam until now. As Wilson finished, Brazo's muscles tightened. All that had been sinister in his manner quickly vanished. He laughed aloud, holstered his gun, and looked at Anderson.

"Hold this man until I come back!" he said, his voice leaping. "I reckon I'm a box head!"

He leaped out of one of the open windows and ran out into the clearing where he had left Blinky. They saw him leap into the saddle and race across the clearing, past the cabin, through the tents and shacks of the deserted town, to vanish at last in the timber beyond.

Hardin and Anderson exchanged puzzled glances. They looked at Wilson interrogatively, as though thinking that he might be able to explain the mystery of Brazo's sudden flight. But apparently Wilson was as puzzled as they, for he stared back blankly.

"Hell!" ejaculated Hardin.

A light seemed to flicker in Anderson's eyes.

"I reckon it'll be heaven for Brazo," said Anderson, smiling. He added: "If she's there."

CHAPTER XXXII

SHE was sitting on a grassy knoll behind a huge rock when Brazo emerged from the cavern into the hidden valley, and all that he saw of her at first was the top of her head and her disordered hair shining in the sunlight. She was facing the entrance to the cavern, and it was evident that she had been waiting and watching for someone to come. That she had expected the outlaws to find her, he did not doubt, for when he saw her hair he also observed that he was gazing into the muzzle of her Colt .45.

The gun clattered down as she rose and held out her arms to him. She shivered as an instant later she snuggled close to him.

"I thought they had killed you!" she murmured, holding him tightly. "Oh, Brazo, don't ever leave me again!"

He laughed, telling her that the only danger he had encountered was when Wilson had told him that she had eluded him somewhere near the river.

"Then my brain began to work again," he added, "and I knew you had come here. But my heart was sure sunfishing for a while."

She drew away from him a little and caught his face in her hands, holding it and smiling into his eyes.

"I had this place in mind all the time," she said.

"Twice I intended to mention it to you, but I was afraid you would try to bring me here while Wilson's men were watching. Then they would have killed us. I shot four times when they were breaking down the front door," she added, "but I do not think I hit any of them. I hope I didn't. Then I ran to the back door, opened it, and ran through the timber toward the river. I heard them running after me, but it was too dark for them to see me. So I got here safely. A little while ago I went through the cavern and peeked out. I saw men running around and heard shooting. I knew Anderson and the others had come. I looked, but I didn't see you, Brazo; and I thought they had killed you!"

They went back to the knoll and sat there for a long time. Then he told her about Wilson.

"I reckon we'd better get back there," he said. "The boys don't know that you are safe, and they don't like Wilson any too well. Something may happen to him."

He led her through the cavern and across the river to the timber in front of the cabin. They saw Anderson and Hardin standing in front of the doorway. Several horses were tethered in the clearing. The Wainright men had gone into the timber, eastward, with the riders of the horses. As Brazo and Ella approached the cabin, they heard groans, and Anderson answered Ella's look of inquiry with a grin.

"There's three of Wilson's men in there," he said. "They're hurt, but not bad."

"And Brinn?" said Ella quickly, anxiously.

"He's up in the house. I reckon he's goin' to be a cripple. An ankle bone smashed an' one of his ribs

busted by a glancin' shot. I've sent Ed to Cooney for the doctor."

"Where's Wilson?" asked Brazo.

Ella was running toward the ranch house. Brazo smiled, for he had grown to like Brinn.

"Wilson ain't here any more," answered Anderson, his face grave. "I don't know what you wanted us to hold Wilson for, but I followed orders an' brought him here so's we could watch him while we was doin' somethin' for Brinn.

"Well, we brought Wilson in here an' set him on a bench opposite the bunk where we'd put Brinn.

"Brinn was layin' there, pretty helpless an' groanin'. Wilson set there, watchin' him.

"As soon as Brinn seen Wilson, his eyes began to glitter in a sort of wild way. He was ravin' mad, an' he asked us if we'd found Ella. We told him we hadn't, but that you'd gone to look for her.

"'Brazo's a damned fool!' Brinn said.

"I was standin' close to Brinn, an' the first thing I knowed he'd pulled my gun out of the holster. Before I could twist around an' grab him, he'd let it off twice into Wilson. After Wilson fell, he set lookin' at Wilson for a minute. Then he grinned an' said:

"'I reckon that'll teach you to keep your dirty hands off that girl!'

"Then he grinned that wild grin of his an' handed me my gun. So Wilson's not here any more."

Brazo went to the ranch house. When he reached the front door, he saw that a bed from upstairs had been brought down and placed in the room. In the bed was Brinn, and sitting beside him on a chair that she had

drawn close was Ella. Brinn had his back to the door and was talking to Ella. And when Ella saw Brazo she shook her head with a slow negative motion. Therefore Brazo backed cautiously out of the doorway and across the veranda, leaving Ella and Brinn alone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"BRINN likes you, Brazo," said Ella. She was stealing surreptitious glances at him as, two weeks later, they were sitting on the log at the timber where Brazo had sat alone many times in the days when he had been waiting for Ella to come.

"That's odd," gravely replied Brazo. "I've showed him pretty well that I didn't think much of him."

"I know there was a time when you disliked him," she said. "But you like him now, Brazo?"

"There's something odd about the cuss," said Brazo. "He's a wild man. I've done nothing to make him like me. First, at Bain's, I shot him. Then when he came here I showed him that I didn't like him, and tried to goad him into drawing his gun on me. Well, yes, I reckon I like him more than I did."

"That's something," she smiled wisely. "Brinn is the most primitive man I ever met. He's like a child that has not been trained, Brazo. He's wild, and his impulses are violent. But if he likes you he likes you. Moreover, when he likes a person, he wants that person to like him. He'll do anything for anyone he likes."

She was silent for a moment. Then she said gently:

"Brazo, I must tell you something. I should have told you long ago, perhaps. It is this: Ever since Brinn appeared here, I have been giving him money to keep quiet about what happened at Bain's Camp. When he

came here and discovered that I loved you he threatened to go to the sheriff unless I gave him money."

"Yes." Brazo's eyes had grown grim and cold.

"The storekeeper, Bain himself, and the stableman are dead," she went on. "Brinn is the only evidence they have against you. Perhaps they would not believe his word against yours. But you ran away from Bain's, Brazo, and that would be held against you. And I didn't want them to take you away."

"How much did you give Brinn?" he asked.

"Nearly three hundred thousand dollars, Brazo," she answered.

Brazo's eyes widened.

"You wanted me to stay that bad?" he said, his voice suddenly gone hoarse.

"I wanted you," she answered. "So I gave him the money. And he has given it all back, Brazo. He likes us. And he wants to stay with us after—after—always."

Brazo smiled and drew her to him. He was thrilling with the knowledge that she had loved him well enough to sacrifice everything she owned for him. His voice was gentle, reverent.

"I'll try to be worth it," he said. "And Brinn can stay as long as he wants to stay after—after we are married."

That night they sat again on the log. Behind them were the ragged tents and the crude shacks of the deserted city engulfed by the mocking silence of the ages. Farther down were the dark windows of the cliff dwellings looking out, even as they were looking, upon the silent valley, slumberous in the peaceful moonlight.

"Isn't it beautiful!" murmured Ella. "I love it!

I loved it even while Wolf Wilson was chasing me down toward the river. I love it more and more. It is off the main trails, Brazo, and there will never be any crowding here."

Brazo meditated long, so long that she thought he had not been listening to her. So she turned to him inquiringly.

"You weren't listening, Brazo!" she charged.

"I was thinking," he said, "thinking about trails. How did I know I was coming here? Down there in Tombstone I got disturbed. Something seemed to be calling to me, beckoning. I got so I couldn't stay there any longer. So one day I asked for my time. Now, when I left there, I had no trail in mind. I just drifted. And pretty soon I got on to the main trails you just mentioned."

"But I said we were off the main trails, Brazo!" she declared.

"So you said." He smiled at her. "But we are on the main trails, after all. People who live their lives right can never get off of them." Gently, gravely, he went on:

"As far as I can figure it out, there are three main trails that amount to something," he said. "They lead to love, adventure, and wealth. They are the only ones worth while. We have ridden them all."

"And love is the biggest!" she declared.

"And the best," he added. "It's always crowded, too, and always will be. There will always be love."

THE END

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